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THE WORLD'S BEST ONE HUNDRED DETECTIVE STORIES

(IN TEN VOLUMES)

EUGENE THWING
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

VOLUME SEVEN

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THE WORLD'S BEST 100 DETECTIVE STORIES

OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

COMMON STOCK

GERALD CORWIN emerged from the elevator, glanced apprehensively about the ornate lobby of the hotel and walked swiftly toward the dining room. But as he handed hat and cane to the checker a huge, ungainly figure bulked before him and a mild, pleasant voice brought misery where a moment before there had been contentment.

"Gonna eat now, Corwin?"

Gerald sighed resignedly. Too thoroughly a gentleman to display consciously his frank distaste, he was yet too poor a dissembler wholly to conceal it. He merely nodded and strode disgustedly in the wake of the obsequious head waiter, with Jim Hanvey waddling cumbersomely in the rear.

Corwin was disgusted with the whole affair, and particularly that phase of it which placed him under the chaperonage of the ponderous and uncouth detective. Not that Jim had been obtrusive, but the man was innately crude, and Corwin despised crudeness.

One could readily understand his antipathy. The two men where as dissimilar as an orchid and a turnip. Corwin, about thirty years of age, was tall and slender and immaculate, shrieking the word "aristocrat" in every cultured gesture. He was unmistakably a gentleman, a

(From "Jim Hanvey, Detective," by permission of Dodd, Mead & Company, Inc. Copyright, 1923, by Octavus Roy Cohen.)

person to whom æsthetics was all-important, and he could not fail to consider Jim Hanvey thoroughly obnoxious.

Jim was all right in his way, perhaps, but never before had Corwin been forced into intimate association with a professional detective. He was resentful, not of the fact that Jim Hanvey was a detective, but because the man was hopelessly uncouth. Jim was an enormous individual and conspicuously unwieldy. He wore cheap, ready-made clothes that no more than approximately fitted his rotund figure. He smoked vile cigars and wore shoes which rose to little peaks at the toes. But Corwin felt he could have stood all that were it not for Jim's gold toothpick.

That golden toothpick, suspended as a charm from a hawserlike chain extending across Jim's vest, had fascinated Corwin from the commencement of their journey to Los Angeles. It was a fearsome, flagrant instrument, and Jim Hanvey loved it. It had been presented to him years before by a criminal of international fame as a token of sincere regard. Otherwise unemployed, Jim was in the habit of sitting by the hour with his fat fingers toying with the toothpick. Gerald had once hinted that the weapon might better be concealed. His insinuation resulted merely in debate.

"Stick it away? Why?"

"A toothpick——"

"Say, listen, Mr. Corwin; have you ever seen a handsomer toothpick?"

"No, but——"

"Well, I haven't either. That's why I'm proud to have folks see it. It's absolutely the swellest toothpick in captivity."

No arguing against that, but from the first hour of the acquaintanceship Corwin reviled the fates which decreed that for two weeks he should be under Hanvey's eye.

The thing was absurd of course. Corwin, fearless and no mean athlete, was well able to take care of himself

and fulfill the delicate mission with which he had been intrusted—a mere matter of securing a proxy from Col. Robert E. Warrington and returning with it to New York in time for the annual meeting of the stockholders. He was not a simpleton and there was no doubting his integrity. Why, then, this grotesque and goggle-eyed sleuth?

Matter of fact, Jim had appeared wholly disinterested since their departure from New York. All the way across the country he had slouched in their drawing-room, staring through the window with his great, fishy eyes. Those eyes annoyed Corwin. They seemed incapable of vision. They were inhuman, stupid, glassy eyes which reflected no intelligence. Corwin fancied himself the victim of a stupendous hoax; it was unbelievable that this man could rightfully possess a reputation to justify the present assignment.

The meal was torture to the fastidious younger man. There was no denying that Jim enjoyed his dinner, but the enjoyment was too obvious. Jim caught the disapproving glance of his companion and interpreted it rightly.

" 'Sall right, Mr. Corwin. Eatin' ain't no art with me. It's a pleasure."

Corwin flushed. Suddenly he discovered that Jim was not listening. Hanvey had turned slightly and was gazing into a mirror which reflected a section of the huge dining room. Corwin followed the direction of his gaze and saw that the object of his scrutiny was a man of medium size but muscular figure who was searching for a table.

Hanvey was interested, and as an indication of that interest he blinked in his interminably deliberate manner, lids closing heavily over the fishy eyes, remaining shut for a second, then uncurtaining even more slowly. And finally, when the newcomer had seated himself, Jim nodded toward him and addressed Corwin.

"Yonder's the answer," he said.

Corwin shook his head in puzzlement.

"To what?"

"Me."

"I don't quite understand."

"See that feller who just come in?"

"Yes."

"It's him."

Corwin inspected the newcomer with fresh interest. The man was of a type, one of those optimistic individuals who futilely struggle to acquire gentility and who fondly believe they have succeeded. In every studied move of the man one could discern mental effort. Even the hypercorrect raiment was subtly suggestive of a disguise. There was nothing flagrantly wrong with the man, just as there was nothing quite as it should be. Corwin, himself not an overly keen student of human nature, could yet fancy the stranger's manner of speech—careful, precise, studied, stilted, rather malapropian, with here and there a moment of forgetfulness, with its reversion to downright bad grammar. He turned back to Hanvey.

"Who?"

"Billy Scanlan, alias Gentleman William, alias Flash Billy, alias Roger van Dorn, alias, a half dozen other things. He's done time in Joliet and Sing Sing. He's a good friend of mine." The faintest suggestion of a smile played about the corners of Jim's mouth. "An' he's why your crowd hired me to trail you out here."

It was quite plain to Hanvey, but Corwin was puzzled:

"I don't yet understand."

"You don't? Gosh, son, there couldn't anything be any plainer! We ain't never discussed what brought you out here, but I know all about it just the same; an' since you prob'ly won't answer no questions, I'll tell you what I know. The Quincy-Scott gang started a drive recently to grab off the control of the K. R. & P. Railroad from McIntosh and his crowd. Before McIntosh woke up the Quincy bunch had coralled every loose vote, enough to give them a control in the forthcomin' stockholders' meetin'. When McIntosh got wise he knew that his only hope was Colonel Warrington out here in Los Angeles, the

colonel ownin' about ninety thousand shares of common stock. So he telephoned the old bird and found out that he wasn't interested in the fight one way or the other; that he'd already been approached by the Quincy-Scott combination an' had turned 'em down cold an' final, which seemed to indicate that with a little proper persuasion he'd be willin' to deliver a proxy to McIntosh. It bein' 'most time for the meetin', an' things bein' pretty desperate, they sent you out to get the proxy from the ol' gent, his proxy gettin' there meanin' victory for McIntosh, an' its failure leavin' the vote control with Quincy an' Scott. Ain't it so?"

Corwin was staring at Hanvey in amazement. The pudgy detective had been speaking disinterestedly, casually, but he had the most intimate facts at his finger tips. Corwin nodded before he thought, then bit his tongue.

"I'm not at liberty to say whether or not you're correct, Mr. Hanvey."

"Sure you ain't. You're dead right, son. Don't you never spill no beans to nobody no time. I wasn't tryin' to pump you. I got the dope straight from headquarters. I was just tellin' you so you'd understand that I know why I was sent out with you, an' so you'd understand too."

Hanvey paused, and as though that ended the matter he extracted from an elaborately engraved and sadly tarnished silver-plated cigar case two huge black invincibles, one of which he reluctantly extended to his companion. Corwin declined, and Jim sighed relievedly as he tenderly returned the cigar to its place. He lighted the other, inhaled with gusto and blew a cloud of the smoke into the air.

"I still don't understand, Mr. Hanvey."

Jim jerked his head toward Scanlan. "Billy's been sent out by the Quincy gang. His job is to keep that proxy from getting to New York in time for the stockholders' meeting."

"O-o-oh!"

Corwin's jaw hardened, his sinewy frame tensed and a fighting light blazed in his fine, level eyes.

Jim grinned.

"They ain't gonna try no rough stuff. That ain't Bill Scanlan's way of workin'. He's one of the smoothest con men in the known world, but he ain't rough—not Billy. He's smooth as butter."

"Then how——"

"Easy enough, son. He'll be on the same train that carries us back east, an' before we get to Chicago he'll swipe that proxy. At least that's what he's figurin' he's goin' to do."

Matters were clarifying slightly in the brain of young Corwin. But his curiosity was still unsatisfied.

"If I may ask, Mr. Hanvey, how do you know that he is the Quincy-Scott agent?"

Jim shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Easy enough. Y'see, it's this way: When the good Lord manufactured me he forgot to hand me out any good looks an' he slipped me entirely too much figger. But he didn't find that out until too late, so what he did to make up for it was to give me a mem'ry. I've got a mem'ry like a cam'ra, son. I just naturally don't forget things, an' I've sort of built up the rep of knowin' more professional crooks than any other ten men put together. McIntosh knew that the other crowd would engage a professional crook to get the proxy away from you, it not bein' no job for an amachoor. He was sure to foller you out here, an' the way he was plannin' to work was to scrape an acquaintance with you, you never suspectin' nothin', which would have made things pretty easy for Billy. I just trailed along to sort of point out to you the feller you wasn't safe with, an' Billy Scanlan is him."

Gerald Corwin felt a fresh respect for the fat man with the bovine expression, and a bit of his resentment vanished at the same time, for he now understood one or two things which before had left him wholly puzzled and more than a trifle resentful.

They finished their meal in silence. The check paid, they rose and started from the dining room, but Hanvey took Corwin's arm.

"C'mon over an' lemme introduce you to Billy. It'll sort of make things easier for him, bein' introduced formal-like, an' the poor feller's got a tough-enough job on his hands as it is."

Startled but obedient, Corwin followed, and he saw the expression of incredulous amazement, not untinged with apprehension, which flashed into Scanlan's face as they paused by his table.

"Hello, Billy!"

Scanlan rose slowly. His jaw was set and it was plain that he was struggling to orient himself to this bizarre situation. He strove to make his tone casual.

"Hello, Jim!"

Hanvey was exceedingly gracious.

"Lemme introduce my friend Mr. Corwin. Mr. Corwin is the feller you was sent out here to watch, Billy. Mr. Corwin, shake hands with Mr. Scanlan."

Awkwardly the two men—one an innate gentleman and the other a student at the school of gentility—shook hands. Corwin was a trifle sorry for Scanlan. The man seemed afraid of Jim Hanvey.

"I'm pleased to meet Mr. Corwin."

"Sure you are." The voice of Hanvey chimed in genially. "Didn't you come all the way from New York just for that? An' wasn't you wonderin' how you was gonna work it? That's me—always ready to help out a friend, Billy—so I up an' introduces you fellers."

"It's real kind of you, Jim"—Scanlan was choosing his words with scrupulous care—"but I don't quite—er—comprehend what you're driving at."

"No?" Hanvey's bushy eyebrows arched in surprise. "I'd sure hate to think that you wasn't tellin' me the truth, Billy."

"I really don't understand your—a—innuendoes. I'm in Los Angeles on a vacation and without no definite objective."

"Sure, Billy, sure! I know that. You're a gent of leisure, you are. But if you could grab off that fat wad the Quincy-Scott people hung under your nose, you wouldn't have no objections, would you?"

Scanlan's hand dropped on Hanvey's shoulder and he gazed earnestly into the eyes of the detective, Corwin for the moment forgotten.

"Honest, Jim, I'm runnin' straight. I ain't plannin' a thing. So leave me be, won't you?"

"I ain't aimin' to bother you none, Billy. Goodness knows, you're too much of a gent to be in jail. Only it just struck me that I was doin' you a favor by introducin' you to Mr. Corwin, him an' you both bein' genuine swells an' li'ble to have a heap in common."

Suddenly reawakened to consciousness of Corwin's presence, Scanlan pulled himself together.

"Mr. Hanvey is bound to have his little joke, Mr. Corwin. A very interesting chap, isn't he?"

Corwin inclined his head gravely.

"Very."

Hanvey regarded them amusedly.

"You fellers like each other?"

They nodded.

"That's fine! I'm sure glad!" He turned away, then swung back suddenly. "By the way, Billy, we're leaving on the California Limited Friday morning, ten o'clock. We've got Drawin'-room A in Car S-17. I'm tellin' you so you can get your reservations early on that train. Eastern travel is awful thick these days."

They parted from the bewildered Scanlan. In the sanctuary of Hanvey's room Gerald Corwin voiced his displeasure.

"You are probably a very great detective, Mr. Hanvey——"

"Naw! Not me! I'm just a fat, lucky bum."

"But it strikes me that you volunteered some valuable information unnecessarily."

"To Billy?"

"Yes."

"How so?"

"About our reservations east. Why did you tell him the correct day?"

"I never lie to a crook," said Jim gravely. "It ain't fair. Besides, if they're good enough crooks to be worth lyin' to a feller ain't gonna get away with it. Billy will check up, an' once he found I'd lied to him he'd lose all confidence in me."

"But I don't see what difference it makes."

"That's 'cause you're a business man, son. Detectives an' crooks know the value of tellin' the truth."

"You didn't have to tell him who I was."

"No-o, that's true. But it saved him a heap of trouble."

"I don't understand your desire to save him trouble."

"It's this way, Mr. Corwin: The less trouble Billy has to take the more time he'll have for thinkin', an' the more he thinks the worse off he is. Thinkin', son, has ruined a heap of happy homes, an' don't you forget it."

Hanvey was right. At that moment Billy Scanlan was slumped in a chair in the hotel lobby, smoking cigarette after cigarette and wondering what it all meant. He knew Jim Hanvey of old, was familiar with the working methods of the ponderous, slow-moving, quick-thinking detective; and he knew that Jim had told the truth. Of course he'd check up, but that was a mere formality. All the more prominent criminals knew that Jim Hanvey did not lie. That was one explanation of the high esteem in which they held him—because he played fair.

Scanlan was worried. He had been intrusted with a definite mission, one well suited to his peculiar talents. His job was to secure from Gerald Corwin the proxy which Corwin was to receive from Col. Robert E. Warrington and to deliver that proxy to the men who were fighting to wrest control of the K. R. & P. from the McIntosh interests. That was all. The sky was the limit so far as he was concerned. His professional reputation was at stake. Besides, the reward offered by the Quincy-Scott crowd was stupendous, and Billy was sadly in need of ready cash—and plenty of it.

The presence of Jim Hanvey complicated matters somewhat in the way of accomplishing a task already difficult and delicate. But Billy was game and not entirely averse to matching wits with the Gargantuan detective. So he waited patiently in the lobby, watching the elevator bank, and eventually he was rewarded when Gerald Corwin descended, walked swiftly to the street and hailed a taxi.

As he drove off, Scanlan stepped into another cab.

"Follow that cab ahead. Keep about a block in the rear. When he stops you stop."

As Scanlan drove off, he glanced over his shoulder in time to see the ungainly figure of Jim Hanvey climb laboriously into yet a third taxi. He did not quite fathom Jim's motive in following, but he didn't care particularly. He knew that Jim knew he'd trail Corwin. So much for that.

Corwin's taxi driver, evidently aware that his fare was unfamiliar with the vastness of Los Angeles, selected a circuitous route to the Wilshire Boulevard address of Colonel Warrington. He drove through the traffic to Pico and via that important thoroughfare to Western Avenue, swinging across then to the fashionable Wiltshire section, a tremendous area of spotlessly white homes, immaculate lawns, stiff and artificial gardening and aggressive affluence. Before the gates of a huge home, the grounds of which occupied an entire block, Corwin's taxi stopped. Gerald retained his man and entered the Warrington mansion. A block farther down Wilshire Boulevard Scanlan's taxi halted, and a half block behind that Jim Hanvey left his taxi.

Jim, alone of the three, dismissed his driver. And then, slowly and purposefully, puffing on a cigar, Jim waddled up the street toward Scanlan's automobile.

"'Lo, Billy!"

"Hello, Jim!"

"Have a good ride?"

"Pretty good."

"Just wanted to let you know I follered you, Billy. All I done it for was to make sure you was watchin' young

Corwin yonder. I'll be trottin' back to town now." He addressed Scanlan's driver: "Which street car do I take to get back to town?"

The driver vouchsafed the desired information. Scanlan could not forbear a question:

"Where's your taxi, Jim?"

"I let it go. Taxis are terribly expensive." And Hanvey moved heavily away.

Scanlan's vigil continued for more than an hour. Then through the gates of the Warrington home swung a limousine. It stopped briefly while Corwin alighted, paid his taxi and then returned to the big car. The route into the city was more direct this time, and Scanlan followed Corwin and Colonel Warrington into one of the larger Broadway office buildings. He saw them enter the offices of a law firm and knew that Corwin had won the first move of the game of persuading Warrington to issue his proxy in favor of the McIntosh interests.

From his vantage point in the marbled hallway Scanlan kept watch. Eventually he saw a young man emerge from the offices of the firm of lawyers and enter a smaller office down the hall which was marked "Real Estate & Insurance. Notary Public." A second young man returned with the first and in his hand was a small notarial seal. It was obvious to Scanlan that if there was a notary in the law firm he was out at the moment. Alone again, Scanlan ascertained the name of the notary—Leopold Jones.

When Warrington and Corwin descended in an elevator a few minutes later Scanlan did not follow. Instead he produced from his pocket an income-tax blank and went with it to the office of Leopold Jones. Of that young gentleman he requested an attestation of his income-tax return. Mr. Jones found Mr. Scanlan an engaging talker and they chatted for several minutes. When Mr. Scanlan eventually departed Mr. Jones was happily unaware of the fact that in Mr. Scanlan's coat pocket reposed his, Mr. Jones', notarial seal.

From the office building Scanlan visited the city ticket office of the Santa Fe Railroad. He learned readily enough

that Drawing-room A in Car S-17, California Limited, for Friday morning had been sold the day previous to a very fat gentleman. He bought Compartment C in the same car. He returned to the hotel.

Thus far things appeared propitious for Mr. Scanlan.

Jim was a hindrance, of course, and a grave one; but Scanlan operated on the theory that no vigilance is so keen that it cannot be eluded. There remained nothing now save the trip east. At some time between the departure from Los Angeles and the arrival in Chicago it was incumbent upon Mr. Scanlan to secure from Corwin the Warrington proxy.

That night—Wednesday—the three men dined together, Corwin's distaste swallowed up by his keening interest in the peculiar friendship existing between Hanvey and Scanlan. Corwin had always held the idea that criminals and detectives clashed on sight; that the former were habitually in flight and the latter constantly in pursuit. To see them chatting amiably about topics in general, reminiscing over past escapades of Scanlan and exploits of other criminals and swapping theories on unsolved crimes was astounding. Corwin found it hard to reconcile himself to the fact that at the moment the portly detective and the would-be-gentleman crook were engaged in a battle of wits. He later discussed the matter with Hanvey.

"Why don't you arrest Scanlan?"

"Arrest him? He ain't done nothin'."

"He's planning to."

"You can't arrest a man for what he's got in his head. If you could the jails'd be overflowin'."

"You could arrest him for that McCarthy affair I heard him telling you about. He confesses he was involved in the swindle."

"Aw, you know I wouldn't touch him for that! He just passed that dope on as a friend."

"But I didn't know that policemen and criminals were friends."

Hanvey smiled wistfully.

" 'Bout the only friends I got in this world, son, are

crooks. Most of them are servin' time. Some of 'em I put there. But we're friends. This here solid-gold watch charm —that was given me by one of the niftiest con men in the world. I sure hated to send him up."

They checked out of the hotel Friday morning. Billy Scanlan was at the station when they arrived. The heavy train rumbled under the shed and they settled themselves for the three-day journey to Chicago. At Hanvey's invitation Scanlan joined them in the drawing-room and they became absorbed in a game of setback at half a cent a point.

Hanvey and Scanlan waxed violently enthusiastic over the game—— "King for high." "Trey low?" "Well, doggone your ornery hide——" "You're a rotten setback player, Mr. Corwin; y'oughta learn somethin' 'bout the fine points of the game."

Nothing to indicate that a crisis was approaching, no outward manifestation of the drama which was imminent. Occasionally Corwin reassured himself by touching his coat, in the lining of which was sewed the envelope containing the proxy which controlled a railroad. Once Hanvey saw the gesture and he laughed.

"It's safe all right, son. It'll stay safe unless you lose your coat."

Corwin flushed angrily. Hanvey rightly interpreted his anger and extended a fat and reassuring hand.

"I wasn't giving no dope away. Billy knew where you had the proxy, didn't you, Billy?"

Scanlan nodded.

"Sure! It's the regular place."

Both men—detective and criminal—were vastly amused by Corwin's obviousness, and Corwin knew it. But he didn't care. Perhaps the lining of a coat was the regular place to keep a valuable document; certainly it was a safe one; and Hanvey might have been more careful that to remove the last vestige of doubt from Scanlan's mind. Corwin knew that Scanlan could not possibly get the proxy. Such a thing was impossible during the day, and at night Corwin planned to use the coat as a pillow.

Following a light breakfast the next morning, Corwin made his way forward to the club car for a shave. He removed coat, collar and tie, for the moment unmindful of Scanlan. When the hot towel was removed from his face and fresh lather applied he noticed Scanlan sitting with two other men, awaiting his turn for a shave. Next to Scanlan was Jim Hanvey. Corwin sighed relievedly.

The barber shaved the right side of Corwin's face, then turned him in the chair to get at the other side. As he did so Scanlan cast a glance of simulated impatience at the waiting men, rose, donned coat and hat and left the club car.

But the coat which Scanlan wore on leaving the car was Corwin's!

In five minutes' time he returned. Corwin was just emerging from the chair. Hanvey was slumped in a corner immersed in the very-female pictures of a weekly periodical. Scanlan removed Corwin's coat and extended it to that young gentleman.

"Took your coat by accident, Mr. Corwin. Just discovered my mistake."

Corwin's face blanched. He grabbed the coat and touched the spot where the proxy had been. For a single wild instant Corwin contemplated bodily assault, and only the hulking figure of Jim Hanvey and his slow, drawling voice prevented.

"What's the matter, son? What's the matter? You look all het up."

"This thief——"

"Whoa, son, whoa! That ain't no kind of a name to call a crook."

Corwin whirled on Hanvey.

"You don't know what you're talking about! This man has that proxy! He just stole it from me!"

Jim was unperturbed. He turned mildly reproving eyes upon the amused countenance of his friend.

"You didn't go an' do that, did you, Billy?"

Scanlan grinned.

"Mr. Corwin seems to think so."

"Well, I'll be dog-goned! Let's git together an' kinder talk things over."

Back through the swaying, grinding cars went the procession, Scanlan leading, Hanvey next and Corwin bringing up the rear. Corwin was in a cold fury. He felt that he was being made ridiculous—they were laughing at him. He didn't like the looks of the whole business anyway. What assurance had he that Hanvey and Scanlan were not confederates? They were suspiciously intimate, and Hanvey must have seen Scanlan—— In the privacy of their drawing-room Corwin's sinewy figure towered over Scanlan.

"If you don't give me back that proxy I'll break every bone in your rotten body."

Jim restrained the young man.

"Them's awful harsh words, Jack Dalton."

Corwin shook him off.

"I think you're as crooked as he is. I've had my suspicions from the first, and I'm not going to allow any pair like you to make a monkey of me."

It was Scanlan who spoke.

"Just what are you going to do about it, Mr. Corwin?"

"I'll do aplenty!"

"Giving me a licking isn't going to get you anywhere except in jail. We're in New Mexico now; and if you lay a finger on me I'll have you dumped in the Albuquerque lockup tonight; and you can't do the same to me, because you haven't got a lick of proof."

"Will you let us search you and your compartment?"

"Surest thing you know!" He turned to the detective. "C'mon, Jim. Get busy."

Hanvey shrugged and reached for one of his black cigars.

"Ain't gonna waste my time, Billy. If you've got that proxy there ain't no use of my searchin' for it now. I've just got to think things over and get a hunch where you put it. Then I'll get it."

"Do you mean," interrogated Corwin furiously, "that you're not even going to search this man?"

"I do. I mean just that exact thing, son."

"Well, I will!"

Scanlan meekly submitted to the search. Once as Corwin's trembling, clumsy fingers probed into a pocket he deliberately winked at Hanvey, and at the conclusion of the personal search Scanlan led the way to his compartment. Twenty minutes later Corwin, dispirited and dully angry, returned to the drawing-room, where he found Hanvey gazing stolidly out of the window. The detective spoke without turning his head.

"When you git peeved, son, you sure git peeved all over."

The younger man did not answer. He slouched opposite and tried to think, to piece together the ends of this tangled skein. He was distrustful of every one, particularly of the slothful Hanvey. Jim's only other remark did not add to his comfort.

"You sure was careless with that coat, Mr. Corwin—awful careless."

Hanvey was right. He had been careless, inexcusably so. True, there had been a feeling of safety in the knowledge that Hanvey was also in the barber shop; but there was small solace in the thought that it wasn't entirely his fault that too great confidence had been placed by his employer in Hanvey's ability. And now, should Hanvey fail to recover the proxy, he—Corwin—was ruined, a brilliant career abruptly and ignominously terminated.

Meanwhile, in Compartment C, behind a locked door, Scanlan was busy. He obtained a table from the porter and then proceeded to open his suitcase, to unpack it, to remove a false bottom and extract from the space disclosed a sheaf of legal appearing documents. Each of these was strikingly similar to the proxy which lay beside them on the table.

Then slowly and painstakingly Scanlan prepared a duplicate proxy, being very careful that his forging of Colonel Warrington's name should be patently a forgery. The finished job was a masterpiece. No one unfamiliar with Warrington's signature could guess that this was not

genuine, yet a comparison left no room for doubt that Scanlan's work was a forgery. Carefully he inscribed the attestation, affixing thereto the impress of the notarial seal he had stolen from the office of Mr. Leopold Jones. That done, he viewed his handiwork with pardonable pride. He next destroyed the other blank proxies which had been prepared by the Quincy-Scott crowd in New York, placed the forged proxy in the false bottom of his suitcase and put the genuine proxy in an outside pocket of his coat.

At lunch time Scanlan found Hanvey sitting alone at one end of the diner while Corwin sulked at the other. The crook paused by the detective's table and cheerfully accepted Hanvey's invitation to join. Jim nodded toward the tragic figure at the other end of the car.

"You sure have played tarnation thunder with that kid, Billy."

Scanlan shook his head. Naturally tender-hearted, he was genuinely regretful.

"Business is business, Jim."

"Yep, so it is. Kinda tough on the kid, though. He feels bad, knowin' he played right into your hands. An' I ain't feelin' any too spry myself." The detective's dull eyes turned toward his companion and blinked slowly. "Where have you got that proxy, Billy?"

Scanlan laughed.

"I haven't admitted that I have it."

"No-o. An' I didn't ask you to admit nothin'. The point bein' that you can't get away with it, kid. I'll have you held when we get to Chicago and search you—a search that is a search."

Scanlan registered apprehension.

"That ain't fair, Jim. You ain't got a lick of proof that I have the proxy."

"Nope. But I intend to get it."

From the diner Scanlan went back to the observation platform to think things over. He did not relish the prospect of an additional thirty-six hours on the same car with Hanvey. He contemplated dropping off at Albu-

querque, then thought better of it. Jim would merely remain with him. And then an idea came.

At eight o'clock the train pulled into the handsome station at the capital of New Mexico for a one-hour layover. Scanlan walked swiftly up the street toward the post office. There he prevailed upon a registry clerk to accept a letter. In a long envelope he inclosed a note to Phares Scott and with it the proxy he had that day stolen from Gerald Corwin. He sent the document both special delivery and registered. It would get to New York a day or two late, perhaps, but still in ample time for the meeting. Besides, it was not essential that it get there at all. It was only necessary that the McIntosh forces be deprived of its possession.

Scanlan would have destroyed the thing in preference, but he knew that he would have difficulty in collecting his fee unless the document itself was produced.

But even though Billy Scanlan had left the train at Albuquerque, Hanvey and Corwin had not. Hanvey, making quite sure that Scanlan had gone, entered Scanlan's compartment in Corwin's company. The manner of the big detective had momentarily lost its sluggishness. He questioned Corwin.

"Where'd you search?"

Corwin told him. Jim shook his massive head.

"How 'bout his suitcase?"

"I looked in there, of course."

"Sure—of course you did, son. Naturally. But let's us try it again."

Jim dumped the contents unceremoniously on the seat. With deft fingers he went through every garment and even inspected the contents of the rolled traveling case.

"You see," commented Corwin restfully. "I told you nothing was there."

Hanvey paid him no heed. He had closed the suitcase and was inspecting it carefully. Then suddenly he turned it over and thumped it with a heavy, spatulate finger. His pursy lips creased into a smile.

"Think we got somethin', son."

"What?"

"We'll see."

The suitcase was reopened and Hanvey fumbled inside for a moment. Then a button unfastened here and one there and he removed the false bottom. He extended the envelope to Corwin.

"Better see that he don't get another chance at it, son."

With fingers that trembled the younger man spread open the forged proxy, never questioning its genuineness. There it was—Warrington's signature, Jones' attestation, the notarial seal. Corwin seized Jim's hand and wrung it gratefully. His voice was choky.

"I've been a rotter, Mr. Hanvey. I suspected you of being a confederate——"

" 'Sall right, Mr. Corwin. 'Sall right. Don't slop over."

"I can't help it. I feel like a cur."

"Gwan!" Hanvey was touched by the boyish gratitude of his young friend. "Let's get this stuff back in here. Scanlan'll spot that we have the thing, but it wouldn't be decent to leave his stuff all spread out like this."

Ten minutes before leaving time Scanlan returned to his compartment. He opened his suitcase, discerning the disorder—and grinned. Then, pretending disappointment and fury, he rapped on the door of Drawing-room A. Inside he faced Corwin.

"You wanted to start something a little while ago, Mr. Corwin," he snapped, "when you thought I copped a paper from your coat. Well, I'm here to say that whenever you're ready you just wade right in, because, no matter what I've done, I never robbed a gent's suitcase."

A hard, chill smile appeared on Corwin's lips. He rose slowly. From the window seat Hanvey viewed the tableau amusedly.

"Get out!" ordered Corwin.

"Put me out!"

"Get out or I shall!"

Scanlan's eyes met those of the other man, and Scanlan discreetly withdrew.

But that night Scanlan lay in his berth, smoking and smiling. Success had blessed his strategy. The Warrington proxy was en route to New York by registered mail, the envelope specifically marked "For Delivery to Addressee Only." Better still, Jim Harvey thought he had recovered the document. There was the strongest point in Scanlan's favor—the fact that Jim was smugly contented. Now all he had to do was to assume the attitude of a man thwarted. He was a trifle sorry for poor old Jim, yet it was no lack of acumen on Jim's part, but rather a superlative cunning on his own.

During the final twenty-four hours of the journey to Chicago, Gerald Corwin clung to the supposed proxy with a pitiful grimness. Alone with Hanvey in their drawing-room, he sat with his hand against the pocket of his coat. He shaved himself. He slept with the coat for a pillow.

"He got it once," he explained to Hanvey. "He won't again."

Jim smiled.

"Once ought to be enough for any man."

"What made you think of a false bottom to that suitcase, Mr. Hanvey?"

"Same thing that made Billy think of the lining of your coat. Plumb obvious. Gosh! I'll bet Billy's ravin'."

Corwin was frankly admiring.

"And I thought you were no good! I even thought you might be double-crossing McIntosh!"

"That's right, son; that's right. Never trust nobody an' you'll never get a shock. That's my motto. The honester a person is supposed to be the easier he can crook you."

They reached Chicago at noon of the following day. Hanvey and Corwin boarded the Pennsylvania for New York. Scanlan secured a berth on the New York Central. Freed from the Scanlan menace, Corwin thawed slightly and attempted to make late amends to his benefactor.

He even summoned sufficient courage to request a closer inspection of Jim's gold toothpick and to say complimentary things about the fearful weapon which had been anathema to him. Jim bloomed under the praise of his decoration.

"Feller that gave me that had sense," he said earnestly. "It ain't only beautiful—it's useful."

Corwin repressed a shudder.

"I suppose it is."

The gratitude of the younger man was pathetic. He grimly determined to invite Jim to dinner some night—the ultimate test of his fortitude.

They reached New York on time and repaired immediately to the offices of the K. R. & P. There Gerald Corwin delivered over to Garet McIntosh the Warrington proxy. McIntosh congratulated the young man and assured him of the directors' appreciation. But before leaving the room Corwin made a straight-eyed confession.

"You must thank Mr. Hanvey," he said. "The proxy was stolen from me on the train and Mr. Hanvey recovered it."

"Good!" McIntosh dismissed Corwin with a nod and reached for his notebook. "How about it, Hanvey?"

Jim grinned. "Don't listen to nothin' the kid says, Mr. McIntosh. He's game all through, that lad. But it was funny."

At that moment Billy Scanlan faced Phares Scott and gave a detailed report of the success of his mission. A gleam of admiration appeared in the steely eyes of the financier.

"Good work!" he commented briefly. "You'll get your pay when the proxy arrives."

The following day at noon, Scanlan presented himself at Scott's office. His reward was paid in legal tender—— "To avoid the embarrassment of a check." Scanlan nodded and pocketed the money.

"The proxy?" he questioned.

"We've destroyed it. Simply wanted to look it over to make sure we were safe."

That night Billy Scanlan celebrated. The following morning he awakened with a violent headache, and was aroused by a ringing of his telephone.

"Jim Hanvey," announced the slow, drawling voice on the other end. "Can I come up?"

Jim came. He regarded Scanlan interestedly.

"I judge they paid you off all right," he commented.

"They did," admitted Scanlan. "What about it?"

"Nothin'; nothin' in particular." Hanvey glanced at his watch, a tremendous affair, gaudily engraved. "Only that the stockholders' meetin' takes place in just about one hour, an' as a friend I advise you to beat it an' beat it quick."

Scanlan sat upright, hands pressed against his throbbing forehead.

"Me beat it?"

"Uh-huh."

"What for?"

"Takin' pay from the Quincy-Scott crowd for somethin' you didn't do. They're li'ble to get awful sore."

"What are you talking about, Jim? You know good and well I got away with it."

Hanvey shook his head. "Nothin' of the kind, Billy; an' I'm advisin' you as a friend to beat it—an' stay put."

The eyes of the other man narrowed.

"You must be gettin' into your second childhood, Jim. Do you mean to tell me that you haven't yet found out that the proxy you stole from my suitcase was a fake?"

Hanvey's voice was quite matter of fact.

"Oh, that? Sure, I knew all the time that was a fake."

"Well, then——"

"What you ain't never stopped to realize," explained the detective, "is this: The proxy you swiped from young Corwin wasn't no good either."

Scanlan rose abruptly.

"What do you mean—no good? Old man Warrington executed it——"

"Sure he did! An' the next day he executed another to McIntosh. That second one was the only one worth the

paper it was written on. It nullified the first, an' I had it in my pocket all the time. An' when that real proxy appears at the meetin' today the gang you were workin' for is li'ble to get all het up. You see, Billy, you and Corwin both had the wrong dope. I wasn't on that train to keep you from gettin' that proxy off Corwin; I was there to see you did get it so you wouldn't bother me none, me bein' the real messenger."

Headache forgotten, Billy Scanlan leaped for his suitcase and commenced a frenzy of packing.

"I might've known you were too easy, Jim! I might've known it! Anyway, they paid me off yesterday——"

"That's what tickles me," replied Jim; "you gittin' paid for that proxy. It's a swell joke on them fellers. An' say, I got somethin' to show you. You know young Corwin was awful grateful for what I done."

"He should have been."

"He was. He sent me a present this morning. Ain't it swell?"

And beaming with pride Hanvey exhibited the gift of the fastidious Gerald Corwin.

It was a gold-handled toothbrush.

OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

PINK BAIT

THERE was nothing about Mr. Thomas Matlock Braden to mark him as being other than a perfect gentleman. From the moment of his unostentatious arrival he blended perfectly into the tinsel background of the fashionable Indiana resort hotel and while he regretted that the other guests were not aware that he possessed eleven new tailored suits he found contentment in the fact that they were equally ignorant of his eleven aliases.

Tommy Braden was old enough to appreciate the benefits which accrue to one who treads the path of rectitude, and, by the same token, he had attained to a philosophy which was based upon the theory that there was no transgression provided one is undiscovered. He was slightly more than forty-five years of age, tall and lean and quietly purposeful. His black hair was graying at the temples: he presented a picture which impelled passers-by to turn and murmur: "What a distinguished looking gentleman."

In cultivating this external aspect of severe probity, Tommy assumed a virtue which he had not. Morally, Tommy was a total loss. He was courteous and suave and cosmopolitan. And unscrupulous. He feared nothing save detection and ordered his existence upon the hypothesis that the legally constituted authorities are, on the whole, a stupid lot who have mastered the fundamentals of criminology and care nothing and know less about the finer points of the science.

He had long since graduated from the ranks of ordinary crooks. He now handled only tasks which required ex-

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traordinary finesse, infinite patience and an all-embracing knowledge of human nature. He selected his clients with as great care as he chose his victims and the former, at least, had small cause to protest his treatment. Certainly Mr. Michael Donley fancied himself extremely fortunate in having secured the cooperation of so eminent a personage in the criminal world.

The deal between Messrs. Donley and Braden had been consummated in a few moments.

"You know them Vanduyn poils, Tommy?"

"Yes."

"I got 'em."

"I know it."

"How'dja get wise?"

Mr. Braden's thin, ascetic lips expanded into a tolerant smile. "You bungled that job horribly, Mickey. Every dick in the country knows who pulled that job. They'll nab you the first time you turn around."

Mr. Donley made a rueful grimace. "You said it, bo. There ain't a fence will touch 'em. That's why I come to you."

"Yes?"

"How about sellin' 'em for me?"

"I might consider it."

"I'll split fifty-fifty."

Tommy Braden laughed lightly. "You amuse me, Mickey; truly you do."

"An even split—"

"I won't do business with you in that way, Mickey. You're a common crook and I don't care to enter into a co-partnership with you. However, I'll buy the pearls from you for five thousand dollars cash."

"Aw! Tommy."

"Very well." Mr. Braden waved insouciantly. "Sell them elsewhere. I'm rather busy these days."

Mr. Donley knew that he was caught and he knew that Tommy Braden knew it. It was impossible for Mickey to dispose of the gems; in fact, there was a strong likelihood that even Tommy Braden would find

it an impossible task. Certainly there was little doubt that it would tax his capacities to the utmost.

Mickey studied closely the inscrutable countenance of his companion. In it he read a subtle enjoyment of the situation. Mickey was annoyed—chiefly because he was helpless.

"Awright, Tommy. Where's the five grand?"

"Where are the pearls, Mickey?"

"They're cache'd. Didn't dare bring 'em here. The bulls've got me shadowed. It's a shame the way they hound a poor crook."

"It is, Mickey; it certainly is. But it proves that you're wise to sell them to me. They don't care anything for your carcass; they can pick you up any minute they choose. What they're after is the jewels. Pretty nice reward they're offering, isn't it?"

Mr. Donley shook his bullet head sorrowfully. "Ten thousand berries. Gosh. . . . But the point is—where'll we meet?"

Mr. Braden did some careful thinking. "Let's say tomorrow afternoon at two o'clock at the corner of Boulevard and Thirty-second Street, Bayonne. And be sure they don't trail you."

Mickey laughed shortly. "The dick that follies me there is going to have went all over Joisey."

They met as per schedule. Tommy Braden at the wheel of a borrowed sedan. Together they rolled slowly down the Hudson County Boulevard toward Bergen Point. Mr. Donley produced a chamois sack and from it poured forth a stream of pink glory. "Gawd! ain't they beauts?"

Tommy's eyes glittered with the appreciation of a connoisseur. "Very fine, Mickey. A rope of matched pearls . . . hmm! I should say they're worth a hundred thousand dollars."

"Ev'ry dime of that. Say, listen—how 'bout raising the ante a grand or two?"

"Don't be silly, Mickey. Here's your five thousand. Give me the pearls."

Mr. Donley left the sedan at Eighth Street and re-

turned to New York via the Jersey Central. The route chosen by Mr. Thomas Matlock Braden was considerably more circuitous. He crossed the Kill von Kull to Port Richmond and traversed Staten Island to St. George where he boarded the New York ferry. He reached his apartment, concealed the pearls carefully and four days later departed for Indiana.

Braden's mind was agile, and before his departure he had carefully planned every move of the delicate game. For one thing he had obtained several magazines which contained pictures of a certain Mr. Jared Mallory. Mr. Braden had always been interested in Mr. Mallory. The interest had been aroused once by the casual comment of a detective friend that they were not dissimilar in appearance. Mr. Mallory was a trifle older, true, but he had the same lean, sinewy figure; the same easy grace of bearing; the same appearance of gentility and the same touches of gray at the temples. Of course no person who knew Mr. Mallory could ever confound the twain, but a person who had never seen Mr. Mallory (and few had beyond his limited circle) could very readily believe that Tommy Braden was he, provided that belief was suggested.

Tommy Braden was a great admirer of Mallory's. The latter was all that Tommy would have liked to be. He was immeasurably wealthy, he did not work, he existed in a little world of his own and looked with fine and distant disdain upon the senseless turmoil of a commercial world. If he dabbled at all in the marts of commerce it was with a magnificent aloofness which kept his name clear of financial news. One could imagine him as a person whose fortune was invested exclusively in government bonds. But the greatest link between Messrs. Braden and Mallory lay in the fact that the latter was by way of being a jewel collector.

Tommy, too, collected jewelry, although in a rather more informal way. A gem to Mr. Mallory was a thing of beauty and of glory; something to be treasured and gazed upon and studied. Mr. Braden, being rather grossly material, saw in a jewel only its intrinsic worth and its

marketable value where the method of its coming into his possession had been a bit questionable. But he loved jewelry none the less . . . the viewpoint of the two men was basically the same although diametrically opposite in the working-out; Braden saw jewels in terms of cash; Mallory saw dollars in terms of gems.

Jared Mallory was known to the masses in a vague way, such as a king is known. He was a person without a public personality. He shunned publicity and human contact outside his own little personal circle. He was a living definition of the word exclusive in its sociological application . . . and so it was that very few persons were aware of the fact that Mr. Mallory had but recently sailed for France. Tommy Braden knew it, but that was only because Tommy happened to have an interest in Mr. Mallory. And now Tommy planned to cash in on his observation of the millionaire jewel-collector.

Tommy's decision to visit the famous Indiana resort was the result of careful deliberation. He knew that this was the last place in the world that Mr. Mallory would ever visit, and it was logical to presume that Mr. Mallory's intimates would also shun it. They were to be found on private estates situated in Florida or along the Carolina coast . . . anywhere but at a blatant resort hotel.

Nor was Mr. Braden wrong in his conjecture. Of the thousands of guests who thronged the hotel lobby, the golf course, the casino—there was not one who had ever personally seen the famous Mr. Mallory although there were several whose bank balances contained as many figures as that of the gem collector. Which did not mean that Mr. Braden's fellow-guests were socially doubtful but rather that Mr. Mallory's status was such that the hotel would have considered he was paying it an inestimable compliment by deigning to visit.

Tommy arrived at the hotel late one evening. He knew that one or two guests commented upon his distinguished appearance as he crossed the lobby. Such comment always pleased Tommy. It was a tribute to something which was innate. He liked to tell himself that he was not a

snob . . . he intended fully that the reputation of Mr. Mallory should not suffer by reason of any misapprehension which might be more or less deliberately engendered in the minds of his fellow-guests.

He registered in a cramped scrawl which bore a startling similarity to the labored chirography of Jared Mallory. But Tommy was nothing if not honest. The clerk whirled the register and glimpsed the signature—

THOMAS M. BRADEN—New York.

"I wired for a suite. . . ." Tommy's voice was rather indifferent, his manner bored.

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." The gong. "Front. Show Mr. Braden up to Suite F."

The dinner hour approached. Mr. Braden bathed and dressed with scrupulous care in an ultra-conservative dinner jacket. There was about his rather statuesque figure an air of stateliness which harmonized with the conventional simplicity of his garb. His dress was so unobtrusive as to command instant attention. He descended to the lobby, crossed to the dining room and slipped a crisp and ample bill into the willing hand of the headwaiter by way of assuring himself the proper respect.

He knew that more than one person commented upon him during the course of the meal. For the most part he kept his eyes down, but when they did chance to focus upon some person, that individual experienced the unpleasant sensation of being looked through. More than one consulted the clerk after dinner for information as to the identity of the stranger who had now retired to a corner of the lobby and was puffing lightly upon a monogrammed cigarette.

Among those who had particularly noticed Tommy was a couple from the Middle West: a rather wizened gentleman of some fifty-five years and his unduly ample wife. Mr. and Mrs. Edgar H. Morse had, for the past five years, been frantically attempting to create the impression which Mr. Braden was now registering so profoundly.

Wealth had come to them in an unexpected flood. They were not crude persons but they did lack the background which is essential to true culture and, as earnestly as they had struggled for financial success during the years which were rather more lean than fat, so they set about adjusting themselves to the social demands of their miraculously acquired millions.

They were rather pathetic as they hung on the fringe of things and sought to absorb in a few years the social ease which must be born in one. They were not aggressive in their wealth—as a matter of fact they scarcely understood it; had not yet fathomed its meaning. And their tastes were those of the contest-answerers who send in to the editor lengthy replies to the prize query: "What would you do if you suddenly inherited a million dollars?"

Mr. and Mrs. Morse strolled over to the desk and made inquiry of the clerk.

"Oh! him? That's Thomas M. Braden."

His manner indicated that anyone who was anyone would certainly know Mr. Thomas M. Braden. Mr. Morse caught the nuance and uttered an enlightening—"A-a-ah! So it is."

"He's a wonderful looking man," commented Mrs. Morse. "So distinguished."

They managed to seat themselves near Tommy. He appraised them scientifically. There was no mistaking their new and complete wealth— "Woman—no taste—but nice. Swellest modiste in New York—make me the grandest gown you got. He's a bird that ain't sure yet whether he ought to wear plain or patent oxfords with his dinner jacket. They look soft."

He was apparently oblivious to their proximity until Mr. Morse apologetically borrowed a match. He did so apprehensively and was put instantly at ease by Tommy's manner. But Mr. Braden immediately appeared to lose interest in them. He was gazing out across the lobby—in but not of the crowd. And just when the Morses had become discouraged Tommy turned to them with a question— "How far is the golf links from the hotel?"

Edgar H. Morse expanded instantly. He orated jerkily upon the nearness of the first tee, the condition of the course, the scenic beauties of the place—and wound up with the inevitable question of all golfers: "What do you shoot?"

Tommy shrugged, "I'm not very good. When I break a hundred I'm satisfied."

"Just my game. I did a 98 today and I'm tickled pink. Of course I hole every putt and most of 'em don't. You booked up for a game in the morning?"

Tommy Braden bestowed upon his companion a stare in which there was the faintest hint of disapproval; a stare such as he fancied Jared Mallory might confer. Morse felt a sensation of faintness.

"No-o," answered Tommy, "I'm not."

There was an awkward pause. Edgar Morse desired to invite this regal gentleman to play with him but he dreaded a rebuff. And just when the subject was about to expire naturally, Tommy ventured a polite "Why?"

"Why—er—a-—I just sort of thought. . . . That is, if you weren't—"

"That we might play a round?"

"Yes. Yes." Eagerly. "If you would—that is, if you'd care to."

"Delighted. What hour shall we tee off?"

"Don't know—course crowded—have to get starting time." He rose excitedly. " 'Scuse me minute. I'm in strong with the starter—give 'im cigars—and—er—things. See if I can't fix it. . . ." He darted away, leaving Tommy with Mrs. Morse. She favored him with a wistful little smile.

"That's real nice of you," she said. "Eddie just dotes on golf."

"I'm sure I shall enjoy it."

"Oh! sure you will. As soon as you get to know Eddie real well—that is, if you should—you'll like him tremendously. He's been awful lonesome here. . . ."

Edgar H. Morse returned, flushed and triumphant. "Fixed him. Ain't hard when you know how. We're off at nine-fifteen. Say, I'm all pepped up."

Tommy took a cigarette from a platinum case. He extended the case to his new-found friend. Edgar Morse took one and glanced at the monogram. He wanted to note the brand of cigarette this gentleman used that he might unostentatiously duplicate it at the earliest possible moment.

His eye focussed upon a simple monogram. Private brand . . . but no: the initials were distinctly not T. M. B. He inspected more closely, then lighted the thing and inhaled deeply. "Fine cigarette. What make?"

"My own," answered Tommy Braden suavely.

They chatted amiably for a few moments and then Tommy rose, expressed polite regrets and moved away. "T'morrow morning, remember," the little man flung after him. "We'll have a great round. Er—a—that is, I hope we will."

Tommy smiled his best Mallory smile, indicating the ultra-correct degree of mild enthusiasm. And when he had taken hat and stick and disappeared Mr. Edgar H. Morse did a very peculiar thing. He reached eagerly into the ash tray and rescued therefrom two frayed cigarette stubs. Mrs. Morse was duly horrified.

"Eddie! What in the world!"

But Edgar did not hear. He was frowning slightly and his gaze was fixed intently upon the monogram of Tommy's privately made cigarettes.

"Listen, Ella—you heard him say they were his private cigarettes?"

"Yes. But a good many gentlemen—"

"Sure. Sure. I'm not saying they don't. But there's something peculiar about this chap. See this monogram here—it ain't T. M. B. at all. The initials are J. M."

From the deepest shadows of the spacious veranda, Tommy Braden was a witness to the little scene. A slow smile of satisfaction creased his thin, patrician lips. "So much for him," he murmured. "That Mallory monogram was a great idea. Our trade mark—once seen, never forgotten."

The game of golf was enjoyed by both men. They

played a nip and tuck contest which atoned in competitive value what it undoubtedly lacked in skill. It was not until the seventeenth green when an impossibly long putt caromed off a match stick and clicked into the cup that victory finally perched upon the Morse banner. The little man was jumpy with excitement.

"Great game—wonderful. Ain't often I meet a guy I like to play as much as I do you. Besides, most of the chaps I know can beat me—beat the tar out of me. I'm an awful dub. Say—we got to do this again—a—that is, I hope we got to."

"We shall," smiled Tommy. "I've enjoyed the morning immensely."

From the eighteenth green they strolled to the clubhouse where they indulged in long, tall lemonades which appeared to inspire Mr. Morse with no particular enthusiasm. "Got something in my room. C'mon and sample it. That is—a—if you care to."

Mr. Braden was delighted—far more than he cared to admit. One glance at the suite occupied by the Morses and he was well satisfied that he had picked his victim competently. He knew just about what this suite was costing and his keen eye missed no detail of the many which shrieked new and amazing wealth.

Mrs. Morse inquired interestedly as to the details of the match—a frequently interrupted and garbled account which had to do with lucky breaks, horrible kicks, phenomenal putts. . . . "We're gonna play again in the morning," finished Edgar. "That is—er—Mr. Braden says he wants to. 'Course I'm not blaming him for kicking. That last putt of mine didn't have any right going down. I always did believe that putting was too all-fired important in this game. . . ."

The fraternity of golf engendered a friendliness which would have been long in developing else. It was decided that they should dine together that night, and about five o'clock in the afternoon Tommy visited the florist shop in the hotel where he ordered a corsage bouquet sent up to Mrs. Morse. "Right here." he reflected, "is where the

old dame gets hooked right. And at the same time I exterminate another bird."

"Shly write the card?" inquired the obtrusively blonde young lady at the counter.

"No-o." Tommy produced a card which he flipped across the counter. She glanced at it indifferently.

"Cash?" she inquired, "or shly charge it to y'r room, Mr. Mallory?"

He started visibly. "What's that?"

"Shly charge it to your room or juh wanna pay cash?"

"I mean—what was it you called me?"

She glanced at the card. "Mallory. That's what the card here says, an'—"

He snatched it brusquely from her hand. "Wrong card," he snapped making an effort to appear as though he were making an effort to appear unembarrassed. "Here's my card. You may charge it to Suite F."

He whirled and moved away, his manner denoting extreme irritation. The rather fullblown young lady stared after him. "Now ain't he the pussy's ankle?" she murmured reflectively. "Gets sore because he slips me the wrong card. That ain't nothin' to get peeved about." An assistant manager drifted toward her counter. "Say, Gus —who's the flossy bird with the gray thatch which just rambled away from here?"

The young gentleman shrugged. "I got worries of my own, Susie. What's the matter—he been trying to date you up?"

"No. But he ordered a corsage sent up to some female an' he slipped me the wrong card. I looks on the card an' reads the name an' I says 'Shly charge it to your room, Mr. Mallory?" an' with that he like to of bit my head off. He just about gives me the bum's rush gettin' that pasteboard which he tears up right away. Then he slips me this one—Mr. Thomas Matlock Braden—I don't see nothing to get excited about just because he slips me the wrong pasteboard, d'you? What difference does it make to me if his name's Thomas Braden or Jared Mallory or what it is. I reckon neither of them handles is

gonna start no war—Say! Gus—for the love of Mike, what's eatin' you? If you feel like that you'd ought to see a Doc."

The ninth assistant manager put out a delicately restraining hand. "Jared Mallory?" he said half to himself.

Susie was annoyed. "Now listen at me, Gus—"

"I thought Braden wasn't his name. Jared Mallory! Holy Suffering Catfish! Say, you ain't sure about that, are you, Susie?"

"No. Of course I ain't. I only know it, that's all. If you think my lamps have went bad you can assort them card which he flang on the floor."

It took the young man but a few seconds to recover the torn bits of pasteboard and arrange them in proper order. "Well, I'll be darned—Jared Mallory is right. Say, lemme tell the Chief."

Susie restrained him briefly. "Who is this bird Mallory —that you should get all het up over him? Who did he ever kill?"

"Jared Mallory," explained the excited young man, "is one of the richest nuts in the United States: that's all. He's got a bankroll so big you'd have to have four eyes to see it all."

"Then why the alias?" she queried practically.

"This joint ain't Mallory's size. He's the kind of guy who thinks he's slumming when he visits a hotel like this. Is that clear now?"

"Sure—sure it is, Gus. Clear as mud."

It required just five minutes of the young man's time to transmit his enthusiasm to the manager. "Of course," counselled that dignitary, "you shall do nothing to embarrass Mr. Mallory. If he desires to visit us incognito—"

And within ten minutes the manager had informed two of his particular friends that Jared Mallory, the millionaire, was registered at the hotel under the name of Thomas Matlock Braden. By dinnertime that night a dozen persons knew it and before morning Tommy was a marked man—at which Tommy merely smiled a thoroughly satisfied smile. "When Mr. Barnum spoke his

famous words," he soliloquized, "he must have been timing things with a slow watch."

It was fully forty-eight hours before the rumor of Braden's identity reached the ears of Mrs. Edgar H. Morse. At receipt of the tidings she almost collapsed. "That's right—I knew all the time he was somebody tremendous." And she proceeded to recount the incident of the monogrammed cigarettes.

But it was in the privacy of the Morse suite that the knowledge received a most thorough threshing out. "Golly!" breathed Edgar. "Think of me bumming around with Jared Mallory. Honeybunch! we're sure sliding up the social ladder now, we are. I thought there was something funny about those cigarettes. And he's a gentleman right—he is; so much of a one he don't have to be watching his step all the time. Funny he should like me—er—a—that is, if he really does."

Thus far Mallory was merely a name to Edgar Morse and Edgar Morse was only a name to Tommy Braden. Each set in motion inquiries as to the other. Tommy's task proved the easier.

Within five days he was in possession of full information regarding the financial and social standing of his prospective victim. He knew that Mr. Morse had been a ten-thousand-a-year man with an aptitude for saving until a certain wild venture in war babies had catapulted him into the multi-millionaire class; so suddenly, in fact, that neither the excitable little man nor his wife had yet adjusted themselves to their new position in life. Tommy rather liked them; they weren't the offensive type of *nouveau riche*—there was nothing aggressive or vulgar about either. And Tommy was convinced that he would not be doing them an injury by selling to them the Vanduyn pearls. According to Tommy's way of figuring the detectives would never suspect that handsome jewels in the possession of Edgar H. Morse had been come by illicitly, so that, under the deal he contemplated no one would be the loser. "No one except Vanduyn," he mused, "and that baby is stung anyway."

Information regarding Jared Mallory came less readily to Mr. Morse. Mr. Mallory was not among those present in the Dun and Bradstreet reports; but now that the great hotel was agog with knowledge of Tommy's supposedly true identity, scraps of information were working into a comprehensive—and rather flattering—whole. As a matter of fact the actual presence of Jared Mallory would not have excited the curiosity caused by Tommy's incognito. There was something irresistibly intriguing about a man who sought to conceal his eminence—something of greater allure than the eminence itself. Mr. Mallory—so general comment had it—possessed the wealth of Crœsus, the family tree of a Plantagenet and he was inclined to be more or less of what the public expressively if inelegantly terms a nut.

Within a week all doubt which may have existed as to his being Jared Mallory had been removed. The manager had personally made occasion to visit Tommy's room when Tommy was absent. He found a half hundred cigarettes monogrammed J. M., one or two handkerchiefs with the same embroidered initials and an ancient letter addressed to Jared Mallory's New York address.

But even at that Tommy was not entirely satisfied. He closeted himself one day with the manager and explained to him that a telegram might possibly come to the hotel addressed to Mr. Mallory; in which event it was to be delivered to him. No such telegram ever arrived, but whatever doubt may have remained to the manager was promptly and effectively set at rest. Nor did that personage maintain the secrecy which had been demanded of him. True, he passed the information only to certain intimate friends who, in turn, conveyed it to their own intimates—until the positive knowledge was the property of the entire guest personnel.

There was, of course, an avalanche of attention showered upon the supposed Jared Mallory, to all of which he was magnificently indifferent. He was courteous and frostily impersonal. He accepted one or two invitations

with an air of bespeaking condescension, and through it all he vouchsafed his intimacy only to the Morses.

But even with them he maintained a reserve. Edgar Morse, prideful of his recent success, told Tommy of it, thereby bringing no agony of soul to Mr. Braden; but of himself Tommy never spoke. He did mention casually an acquaintanceship extending from Cape Town to Bombay and from New York to Sydney; he spoke feelingly and with passionate intensity whenever the subject of jewels was mentioned and he openly admired an unusually handsome emerald which Mrs. Morse possessed. But not once was he other than Thomas Matlock Braden—even on the memorable evening when Mrs. Morse, carried away by her interest in the conversation, addressed him as Mr. Mallory.

Tommy's forehead corrugated in a frown of annoyance. "What's that?" he inquired with frigid politeness.

She flushed scarlet. "Why—er—you see, folks around the hotel say you are Jared Mallory of New York."

There was no doubting his anger. His voice came in crisp and incisive negation: "I am afraid I am not responsible for gossip. I am not Jared Mallory."

Ella Morse was flustered and her husband came eagerly to her rescue. "Now don't you go blaming Ella, Mr. Braden. She's been hearing so much about you being Mr. Mallory and all the folks in the hotel wanting to know if you really were, that she—I—that is, we—we've sort of called you Mr. Mallory to ourselves and the name kind of slipped out. It ain't any business of ours who you are—and we didn't go to cause you any embarrassment. . . ." He paused and spluttered. Tommy stared coldly.

"I understand, Mr. Morse. And I am sure that Mr. Mallory would not be at all flattered."

"No—of course he wouldn't. He'd prob'ly be awful sore. That is—er—a—not because folks thought you were him—of course you're as good as he is any day in the week, including Sundays—but on account of his feeling—well, you know what I mean."

"Yes. I'm sure I do. But let's don't discuss it further. I prefer to remain Thomas M. Braden."

" 'Sall right with me, Mr. Braden. You can be Willie Jones if you want to and it don't make any difference to us, does it, Ella?"

But after Tommy had parted from them that evening after a session at the casino, Edgar swung on his wife. "Goshamighty, Ella—wasn't he sore when he found out folks knew who he was?"

She nodded. "Can you blame him, Eddie? Here he's taken all this trouble to make folks believe he ain't Jared Mallory . . . I reckon he's terribly put out. But there isn't a doubt in the world that he's him. If he wasn't Mr. Mallory he wouldn't get peeved about folks thinking he was."

The friendship between Tommy Braden and the Morses flourished after that little verbal clash. If unpleasant memory of it rankled in Tommy's mind, he gave no indication and his suavity and friendliness put them completely in his power. They drove together—in Morse's car—and Edgar and Tommy played golf daily. He shunned the society of the other guests, rigidly maintaining his attitude of impregnable exclusiveness. And it was after a fortnight of this that the subject of jewelry again came up: neither Edgar nor his wife suspecting that Tommy had introduced the subject.

He appeared to become inspired. He thrilled them with romances of famous gems. The history of renowned jewels he had at his finger-tips. They were seated in the parlor of his suite, the air filled with the fragrance of excellent cigars. . . . "But after all," declaimed Mr. Braden, "there is only one jewel which is worthy the name."

"And that is?"

"The pearl."

They were in enthusiastic agreement. Tommy launched into an expansive account of the pearl fisheries which he claimed to have seen, he explained to them the mysteries of great pearls and enthralled them with his enthusiasm And then—

"I'm passionately fond of them," he confessed boy-

ishly. "And I have something here—if you'd like to see it."

A significant glance flashed between the others. The jewel-collector had been humanized by his hobby. . . . He opened one of his trunks and a few seconds later returned with a battered leather case of sizeable dimensions. They gathered near him at the table, and then, very slowly and worshipfully, he flung back the lid.

The Vanduyn pearls smiled up at them in pink perfection. Mrs. Morse gasped with delight.

"Oh-oh! How glorious!"

Tommy caught up the rope of gems and ran them caressingly through his fingers. "They are among the most perfect pearls in the world—each one a match for every other one. Each has its history, its romance. It has taken me years to collect them."

They were mesmerized by the magnificence of the jewels. And, while they stared under the spell, Tommy talked softly and well about them. He described the long stretches of sandy beach, the attols and palm stretches of the somnolent South Seas—the slumbering coral reefs, the mahogany-skinned Kanakas. His voice trembled as he described the pearl fishing operations, the shark menace; the dangers faced by the pearl producers. He was a natural actor and he held the little manufacturer and his wife in the hollow of his hand. And then, just when it seemed as though they could no longer endure the glory of the thing he showed them—he snapped the case shut and turned away.

In a second he had dropped back into his customary manner: scrupulously polite, a trifle distant, unutterably exclusive. But the Morses were no longer with him in spirit. They were dazed. It was Edgar Morse who sounded the words which brought a lilt of triumph to the heart of Tommy Braden.

"I'm rather sorry you showed us those, Mr. Braden."

"Sorry?"

"Yes. I want them."

Tommy smiled good-humouredly. "Then I, too, am

sorry. I'm afraid there are no other pearls precisely like these."

Tommy Braden knew he had builded well. He deliberately shunted the conversation from the subject of jewelry, knowing that the little man and his sweet-faced wife would discuss the pearls once they were alone again. Nor was he wrong. They were captivated by the sheer beauty of the things; and their suddenly aroused passion had nothing whatever to do with the intrinsic worth of that which they had come to covet.

"If he would only sell them," she said wistfully. "They would cost a fortune, but—"

"It isn't the money," he answered. "Mr. Mallory doesn't care for money and he does care for his pearls: that's all. I'm sure he'd never sell them—er—that is, I don't think he would."

"We could ask him."

"I'm afraid we couldn't. We might hint around . . . that is, kind of test him out."

But, somehow, they found that assignment unreasonably difficult. Their mention of the pearls the night following excited no response from him, but on the night after that he consented to again display the magnificent rope. He told them off, jewel by jewel . . . but his manner forbade the mention of a sale. Talk of dollars and cents in connection with their flawless beauty would have been a sacrilege.

Morse did essay one valiant attempt— "We'd be awfully appreciative, Mr. Braden, if you could help us get some pearls exactly like those—er—a—that is, if there are any."

The other man shrugged. "I'm afraid there are not," he retorted briefly.

Tommy was playing an ultra-careful game. He was making progress slowly but surely; casting himself in the rôle of quarry. And he might have continued in just that way had not something occurred on the ensuing day which caused him considerable apprehension.

At first he did not see the Gargantuan figure which

hulked at the desk and wrestled with the register. It was not until the stranger turned and surveyed the lobby through glassy, fishlike eyes that a premonition of danger smote him. His face hardened and he whistled sharply through his teeth.

The person at the desk was not one to inspire any emotion other than the most intense amusement. He was a man of overflowing girth and lumbering manner. His clothes were grotesquely misfit; the coat flapped loosely about the protuberant torso and the material of the suit glistened with a sheen begotten of arduous wear. Beneath the pants-cuffs shone a brief expanse of cheap, lavender sox topping aggressive russet shoes, the toes of which rose to points. From the top of the vest there was exhibited a small area of lavender silk shirt, a purple polka-dotted necktie and a collar of insignificant height but amazing circumference.

But it was the face which inevitably engaged the attention—engaged it and held it even more than the absurdly powerful gold chain which spanned the vest and held dangling from it a golden toothpick with which the big man toyed absently as he gazed about the lobby. The face was a fitting final touch to the ensemble. It was an enormous face; a pudgy, expressionless face; a face flanked by loose, pendulous jowls ruddily complexioned; a face like a great pudding set with two glass marbles.

A casual observer might have believed that those eyes were sightless as they stared stonily across the lobby. Once or twice the man blinked—the process consuming an interminably long time. He yawned with his eyes, but it did not seem to matter whether they were open or closed. And at length he heeded the irritable summons of an excessively peeved bellhop and turned to follow that person into an elevator.

Tommy Braden stood flatfooted staring as though at an apparition. But once the cage door closed, Braden crossed the lobby swiftly and glanced at the register.

JIM HANVEY—New York.

He turned away. He strolled out upon the spacious veranda where he lighted a cigar and puffed reflectively. Eddie Morse and his wife, Ella, would not have known their friend at that moment. Tommy's face was hard and bitter and there was fear delineated in it. He put his thoughts into unspoken words—

"What the hell is Jim Hanvey doing here? Why should a detective like him come to a joint like this?"

Tommy Braden, by dint of hard and untiring work, had risen gradually to the very top of his profession. The road had been neither easy nor undangerous. He had faced disappointment and reversal with a bravely smiling face—and now he had come to the point where he felt entitled to reap the fruits of his endeavor. Tommy had been the despair of detectives. He operated with an easy suavity and a level-headed cunning which sent them running up blind alleys in the futile search for evidence to convict, so that thus far Tommy had avoided the inconveniences of jail—save in the case of a single slip in the early days of his career.

That single jail sentence rankled in Tommy's breast, and it had inspired in him a wholesome fear of state boarding houses. In jail one was deprived of one's individuality and individuality was Tommy's greatest stock in trade. He intensely disliked swapping his name for a number and his exquisitely tailored clothes for a uniform. It seemed a great pity that the state had no more judgment than to fail to differentiate between crude, lumbering crooks and gentlemen of the profession who operated with delicacy and finesse. But, after all, Tommy Braden feared only one man in the detective world, which was why he was so visibly disturbed at finding himself a fellow-guest of that one man.

The following morning he played golf with Edgar Morse. He unbent more than ever before and dazzled the little business man so thoroughly that Morse's mind was not on the game and he lowered his course record seven strokes. "By Golly!" reflected Mr. Morse, "there ain't a

doubt that this Braden or Mallory, or whoever he is, really likes me."

Tommy was annoyed. He had been enjoying the cat-and-mouse contest and Jim's advent forced him to greater speed than he had planned. They walked in from the eighteenth green together, consumed large drinks of iced sarsaparilla which Mr. Morse insisted was excellent for the blood, and then Tommy made his way to the hotel while Mr. Morse selected his favorite putter and a half dozen balls for a session of utterly useless practice on the clock course.

Tommy saw the hulking figure of the mammoth detective too late to avoid a meeting. He was perturbed but at the same time thankful that his introduction to Jim at this particular time should come while he was unaccompanied. And realizing the inevitability of a talk with Jim, it was he who spoke first.

"Well, well, well—if it isn't my fat friend."

Jim looked up. Heavy eyelids closed over glassy orbs with maddening slowness, held shut for a moment, then uncurtained with even more annoying deliberateness. There was no doubting the sincerity of the surprise which was reflected upon the pudgy countenance.

"Well I'm a sonovagun! Tommy Braden!" Their hands met in a clasp of sincere cordiality. "It is Braden now, ain't it, Tommy?"

Tommy smiled with rare good-humor. "Surest thing you know, Jim. Thomas Matlock Braden."

"The whole works, huh? What's it feel like to be masqueradin' under your right name?"

"Pretty good, Jim; pretty good. I've retired on my income."

"Quit the game?"

"Entirely."

"That's fine, Tommy—fine. I'm tickled pink to know it. I always like to see a crook with sense enough to know when he's got plenty. There ain't nothin' like honesty, my boy, when you've made all the money you need."

"That's what I figured, Jim. There wasn't any use for me to continue running risks. . . . Of course I'm not what you'd call a rich man, but then I'm pretty well fixed. And not being tied up with a frail, it don't cost me much. . . . You know how it is."

"Sure, Tommy—I know." Jim blinked with friendly approval upon the other. "Dog-gone if you don't look like a million dollars ready money, Son. Silk shirt, trick pants an' everything. Say, what is there to this golf thing that makes sensible men dress funny thataway?"

"Ever played?"

"Naw! Imagine an elephant like me chasin' a dinky little ball over the meadows."

"Better men than you have fallen for it."

"Sure; I know that. But it's my figger, Son. The links wouldn't stand for it."

Jim turned and walked with Braden toward the hotel. Tommy was ill-at-ease despite the apparent ease of his manner. Jim's face bore an expression of bovine contentment; he looked like a child—or a simpleton. Tommy knew that he was not a good man to have around, and yet he was afraid to protest too fervently that he was now treading the path of rectitude. Yet his curiosity shrieked for appeasement.

"Funny to see you here, Jim."

"Me? I reckon it is. I've been some awful funny places, Tommy."

"Vacation?"

"Uh-huh. An' I just naturally got sick of lowbrow joints. Besides, a lot of the big boys in your line of work drift by here during the season, and so I thought I'd try this seven-forks-dinner stuff for a while. Guy never gets too old to learn, you know. Of course I ain't like you—you're a gent an' you fit. I'll bet you wear a movie screen shirt for dinner, eh?"

"Yes. Everybody does here."

"But one. Say: 'jever see me in evenin' duds? No? Honest, I look like next week's wash hangin' out."

"Doesn't exactly fit your style of beauty?"

"No. I reckon when the good Lord gimme a knack of rememberin' faces an' understandin' human nature, He figgered His part was done. If faces was fortunes I'd be bankrupt."

They attained the ornate lobby where, at the desk, Tommy secured the key to his suite. "Come up, Jim?"

"Uh-uh. Got to stroll around: exercise, the Doc says. Gosh! how I hate it. See you later, Tommy. Awful glad you've turned straight."

"Nothing like it, Jim. I never thought I could run across you like this and feel safe."

"Shuh! I wouldn't bother you none."

But despite outward appearances, Tommy Braden was uneasy. It wasn't that he was in any way connected with Jim's visit to this particular resort but rather that Jim's proximity was unhealthy for any gentleman who was upon transgression bent.

Certainly there was no safety in continued procrastination. He had the Morses just about where he wanted them and he figured that the best thing he could do was to sell them the pearls and make his getaway. He knew there'd be no particular trouble—

There wasn't. They dined with him that night, only Tommy being aware of the hulking lonely figure which munched by itself in a secluded corner of the dining room. Edgar Morse was radiant: he was exuberant over his record-breaking golf score and as the dinner progressed he went over for the dozenth time every shot from the first tee to the eighteenth cup. Tommy warmed up considerably. He even unbent so far as to say that Edgar was the first genuinely congenial person he had met in years. He hoped that their acquaintanceship might not perish when they parted, and— Oh! yes, he was leaving in a few days. He wished that there was something he might do to indicate to Mr. and Mrs. Morse the depth of his appreciation for the pleasure their society had afforded.

He corrected interpreted the eager glance which passed between husabnd and wife. "There is," burst out

Edgar, then bit his lip in embarrassment: "Er—a—that is, I was just thinking—I'm kind of crazy, I guess, and—"

"What is it, Morse? Anything in my power . . . You see, I have few real friends. I am more or less well fixed in a financial way, and in such a position one becomes distrustful of persons who protest friendship. . . . Tell me what you were thinking."

"I can't—really. 'Tisn't possible."

"Indeed it is."

"No. Can't."

Tommy beamed upon Ella Morse. "What is it, Mrs. Morse? Certainly we are sufficiently intimate to permit frankness."

She flushed. "Not to that extent."

"Pshaw! If there's any favor—"

"Well, it's this," exploded Morse. "If you wouldn't get sore—that is, if you understood—but of course I can't ask you because they mean more to you than just what they mean and—that is, it isn't like you just had them, and— Oh! damn it! I've got myself all balled up!"

Tommy frowned slightly. "I judge you have reference to my pearls?"

"No! No! Certainly not. That is, I didn't go to pull a bone, and—"

Mrs. Morse leaned across the table. "Yes, Mr. Braden, he does mean your pearls. He's embarrassed because we both realize that it is utterly out of the question to even suggest that you part with them, and—"

Tommy lay back in his chair. He had an infectious laugh and he now injected the full radiance of a pleasing personality in the laughter and good-humored glance he bestowed upon them. "So that's it, eh? Well, well, well! You folks certainly are funny. What in the world should cause you embarrassment about wanting to buy my pearls? Of course you want to own them. I'd be rather hurt if they didn't impress you with a desire for ownership. Why, man! man! I'm complimented."

Morse was beaming. "Dog-gone if you're not the finest fellow I ever met. You see, pearls like those are something that can't be bought from a jeweler . . . and we both love 'em. We're not strong for diamonds and platinum and stuff like that. Pearls—they're classy and rich—and all such as that. And of course from the first minute we saw them we got to thinking how swell it would be if Ella could own them . . . that is, some just like 'em."

"There aren't any just like them."

"Sure! We know that. Gosh! as if we didn't! Now if you were broke or something I'd have offered to buy them—but money doesn't mean anything to you, and—"

Tommy's face had grown serious. He spoke with a rich tremolo effect. "You really want them that much?"

"Want them! Holy smokes! man, you don't know!"

"Very well. I hope you'll permit me to present them to Mrs. Morse."

For a moment there was silence. Morse and his wife stared aghast at this man who offered as a gift a priceless rope of matched pearls.

"Give 'em—"

"Mr. Braden! I couldn't!"

"Certainly you could, Mrs. Morse. You and your husband have afforded me an extremely delightful vacation. It would be a pleasure to present those pearls to you. After all, their intrinsic worth is not to be measured against friendship."

They were dumbfounded. And at length Edgar Morse started to argue. He was overwhelmed by his friend's generosity, but of course it was out of the question for him to accept such a gift. On the other hand if his friend was willing to part with them at all, he would do both an inestimable favor by permitting him to pay for them—any price which Mr. Braden chose to ask; any price at all."

"I'd rather give them to you, Mr. Morse."

"Can't be done—impossible. Entirely impossible. But if you'd only let me pay you. . . ."

"You positively will not accept them as a gift?"

"Positively."

"I'm sorry. Very sorry. But if you put it that way, I agree to sell them to you. You may have them for just what they cost me—seventy-five thousand dollars."

Morse's voice trembled with emotion. "That's wonderful of you, Mr. Braden—wonderful. And I realize that we shall remain indebted to you beyond words. The trouble you've taken . . . the love you have for them. . . ."

"Let's don't talk about them any more, Morse. I shall get the pearls from the safe tomorrow and give them to you." He smiled slightly. "And if you should change your mind during the night and be willing to accept them as a gift, I hope you will let me know."

But they did not change their minds. Instead they talked until far into the morning hours of this Genie . . this gentleman who, for reasons quite his own, masqueraded under the name of Thomas Matlock Braden.

Nor did Tommy Braden immediately drop off into slumber. He donned dressing gown and slippers and sat by an open window staring out into the night. Tommy was exceedingly well pleased with himself. He had operated adroitly . . . certainly there was no hint of suspicion in the minds of his victims. There was a profit of seventy thousand dollars in the transaction, no mean addition to his bank account.

The presence of Jim Hanvey in the hotel was less disturbing now. Tommy smiled at the prospect of some day telling Jim of the deal which had been consummated under his very nose . . . he knew Jim intimately and realized that he would see the humor of the situation. There was something irresistibly funny in the thought that this profit should have been turned within a hundred feet of the one detective in the world for whom Braden held a wholesome respect.

Tommy was up early the next morning. The nearness of his triumph begot a shakiness of nerves which was not unnatural. Matters had moved along like well-oiled

machinery from the outset. There had been no single hitch to beget doubt or worriment.

"Hey! Tommy!"

Braden stopped short to gaze into the expressionless countenance of Jim Hanvey. The elephantine detective was smiling vacuously.

" 'Lo, Jim. Taking a beauty stroll?"

"Uh-huh. Pretty country around here, ain't it?"

"Beautiful."

"Walkin' my way, Tommy?"

Braden's eyes narrowed. He wasn't, but— "Yes," he said and they moved off together; Braden tall and slender and handsome, Hanvey short and thickset and shapeless; a human pudding in a serge sack. It was the detective who spoke first and his tone was mildly reproving.

"Thought you told me you wasn't up to nothing around here, Tommy."

"I'm not." With simulated indignation.

"Then how does it happen that everybody in the hotel thinks you are Jared Mallory?"

Braden threw back his head and gave an excellent imitation of carefree laughter. "That's the funniest thing that's ever happened to me, Jim. You know I don't look unlike Mallory—"

"No-o, you don't. But on the other hand you and him ain't no twins."

"Exactly. But the first or second day I was here somebody started the rumor that I was Mallory and there wasn't any stopping the thing."

"You ain't been trying very hard to, have you?"

"No. Frankly. It amused me to be mistaken for him."

"No—er—reason?"

"Certainly not, Jim. No one has told you that I ever admitted being Mallory, have they?"

"No-o. They haven't—that's right, Tommy."

"Well, then—" virtuously. "What more could you ask? I'm registered as Thomas Matlock Braden and you know that is my true name. To folks who have quizzed me on this Mallory stuff I've insisted that Braden is my name.

My baggage is marked with the initials T. M. B. which couldn't possibly be twisted to stand for Jared Mallory. It certainly isn't my fault, Jim, if a lot of fool people choose to believe I'm someone I'm not, is it?"

"No. I reckon it ain't, Tommy. Of course you can't blame me for thinking it funny—when I heard folks saying that you was Mallory. It looked kind of queer."

Tommy dropped an affectionate hand on Jim's shoulder. "You can't help being suspicious of everybody, can you, Jim? Why, dog-gone your time, I've been running straight for so long it's a habit. That's why I didn't even use an alias down here. Goodness knows a fellow can't come any cleaner than to drop a dozen other names and use his own, can he?"

Jim nodded heavily and blinked with interminable slowness. "I feel a heap relieved, Tommy. I sure would hate to see you try to pull something—and I'm glad we had this little talky-talk. Hope you ain't sore at me for thinking maybe there was something queer."

"Not at all, Jim; not in the least. Wouldn't have been natural if you hadn't."

Braden moved away, his last impression of Jim Hanvey was of an abnormally heavy man staring at him through glassy eyes. Against the background of rusty serge he saw a set of fat fingers toying idly with a gleaming gold toothpick. . . . "Poor Jim. He's a hound once they give him the scent but he is so anxious to believe that every crook is honest. . . ."

In his room again, Braden telephoned the Morses. Edgar Morse answered and made an appointment for three o'clock that afternoon. The pearls were mentioned: Tommy repeated his offer to present them to his friend. Morse was grateful, but yet found it impossible to accept so valuable a gift. He assured Braden once more that there would be no less an obligation despite the payment of a sizeable sum of money. Tommy was relieved.

The morning dragged endlessly. Braden took his driver, midiron and a dozen balls and went to the practice tee where for an hour he slashed out clean, straight shots

averaging more than two hundred yards in length. Golfer though he was, he experienced no thrill from the direct, cleaving flight of the balls: he was sufficiently a golfer to know that if his mind were not elsewhere the golfing results would be less satisfactory.

His lunch was tasteless. His eye quested through the huge dining room for a glimpse of Edgar Morse and his wife. They were nowhere to be seen. He knew that they were either lunching in the grill or out driving. The hands of his watch progressed with exasperating slowness. He feared that something might go wrong at the eleventh hour . . . occasionally he touched the leather case in the inside pocket of his coat. . . .

But he did not permit his impatience to cause a tactical blunder. It was fully ten minutes past the hour of his appointment when he rapped upon the door of the Morses' suite. Edgar answered in person. The eyes of the little man were a-gleam with eagerness. One glance at Morse and Mrs. Morse convinced Tommy that all was well. They were effusive; couldn't thank him enough for his generous offer of the previous evening and they hoped that he hadn't changed his mind—and that he wouldn't later regret having sold the pearls.

A pæan of triumph sang in Braden's heart. He extracted the pearls from his pocket and snapped the case open. Mrs. Morse gasped. He lifted the rope of pearls and personally fastened them about her throat. She was almost tearful with excitement.

Edgar Morse produced a pocket check book. "And now if you will permit me, Mr. Braden—I—er—believe seventy-five thousand is the amount you mentioned."

Tommy nodded. "Yes. That is exactly what they cost me."

Edgar Morse held his pen poised. Rich color flooded his cheeks. He hemmed and hawed for a moment and then—

"I hope you'll pardon me, sir—but how shall I make this check out?"

Tommy frowned. "What's that?"

"How shall I make it out—that is, er—to whose order?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Well, I mean—you know there's the idea around the hotel—that is, about Jared Mallory, and—"

Tommy's voice was crisp. "Just make the check out to Thomas M. Braden."

Morse nodded and wrote swiftly. He extended to Tommy a check for seventy-five thousand dollars payable to Thomas M. Braden and drawn upon the Loop National Bank of Chicago. "I didn't meant to give any offense, Braden. Of course you understand what I thought—that is, other folks were saying—"

"Quite all right, Morse; that's perfectly all right. I have really been exceedingly annoyed by this silly idea that Braden is not my name." He folded the check and slipped it casually in his pocket. "By the way, are we golfing in the morning? I was hitting them mighty cleanly in practice to-day."

Alone in his room again Tommy inspected the check. Veteran though he was, his heart was pounding. He had played cunningly for big stakes and had won a well-deserved victory. There remained nothing for him to do but pack up and get away; then to convert Morse's check into cash and disappear. He decided upon a European trip; Paris had not known him for several years and he longed for the sensuous pleasures of the Boulevards. . . . He ripped open the drawers of his dresser and the doors of his chifforobe: the task of packing promised to make up in speed what it may have lacked in neatness.

Of course he knew that he must manage his going away carefully. Morse must not know that he was hastening his departure . . . he'd carry one suitcase and send back for the trunks the next day, or else eliminate them from his scheme of things. The important task was to place a maximum of distance between himself and his victims in a minimum of time. He worked feverishly at his packing, pausing occasionally to glance at the check which had recently been handed him. He was a trifle sorry for the Morses, but he figured that they could

well afford to lose the money . . . nor would it prove a loss unless by some mischance the pearls should be recognized and there seemed little likelihood of that. Certainly the Morses did not move on a social plane where they were likely to meet persons familiar with the Vanduyn pearls. They might, of course, boast that they had purchased the pearls from Jared Mallory and news of this might reach that gentleman which, in all probability, would start something. But, in so far as Tommy could figure, no one was suffering through the transaction. What injury had been inflicted upon the Vanduyns had been done long ago.

It was a pleasing philosophy and Tommy Braden felt quite virtuous. He scarcely heard the light rap on the door. Only when the rapping became insistent did he open.

Jim Hanvey waddled into the room. He wore a suit which he fancied was a tweed. It hung loosely about his ungainly figure. The golden toothpick was very much in evidence. Jim blinked slowly—"Gosh! Tommy, you ain't going away, are you?"

Mr. Braden was flustered. He had a premonition of disaster. If only he could hold Jim off for a brief span of time. . . . "Just running up to Chicago for a few days, Jim. Coming right back. Merely carrying one bag."

"Awful swell diggings, Tommy. How much do they sting you for this soot?"

"Plenty, Jim, plenty. Say, how about trotting up to Chi with me for a day or so?"

"Naw! Can't stir, Son. I've got to stick around here another day or so if it kills me. How long you planning to be gone?"

"Oh! two or three days at the most."

"No special business or nothing like that, is there, Tommy?"

Tommy flushed. He had a disturbing presentiment that there was a menace cloaked beneath Jim's words. "Nothing wrong, if that's what you mean, Jim."

"Good boy. It wouldn't be wise for a guy that's as

well fixed as you to take another flyer. Of course I know there's plenty of temptation and all that—but the game ain't worth the electric flashlight, Son—not by a durn sight."

Braden was ill-at-ease. "Wish you'd come along with me, Jim. I hate to travel alone."

"Sorry, Tommy."

"You'll be here when I get back, won't you?"

Jim shook his head ponderously. "Nope. Don't reckon I will. Got to hike back to N'Yawk and turn in a report. I've been right lucky recently, Son; right lucky."

Braden was relieved. "Landed your man?"

"No-o. Not exactly. I wasn't particularly interested in that. It was an insurance company that sent me down here and all they wanted was the stuff. Interesting case, Tommy; awful interesting."

"I'll wager it was." He crammed two suits of pajamas in the travelling bag.

"You know," Jim's voice was easily conversational, "we'd almost given up hope of ever getting them Vanduyn pearls back."

Tommy Braden sat down very suddenly. "The—the what?"

"The Vanduyn pearls. Remember the case? Mickey Donley pulled it."

Braden leaned forward. "I don't quite make you, Jim. Do you mean to tell me that you've discovered the Vanduyn pearls?"

"Surest thing you know. We knew Mickey couldn't get rid of 'em so we watched the boys he was calling on. Trailed 'em thataway, see? And the poor sucker that bought 'em off Mickey found a goat and sold 'em—and I got 'em that way. I'm right lucky about things like that."

Mr. Thomas Matlock Braden was dazed. He knew that Jim Hanvey was speaking the truth. And yet— He gave ear to the even monotone of the detective.

"And say, Tommy; next time we meet I'll take you on

in a golf match. I'm getting my first lesson this afternoon. I run across a swell feller last night. Guy named Morse: Edgar H. Morse. Know him?"

Tommy stared. He moistened dry lips with his tongue. "Go ahead, Jim."

"Well, Eddie Morse is taking me out on the links this afternoon. He says it ain't so hard if a guy is willing to practice for fifteen or twenty years. Think of me swinging a golf club. I'll feel like a sap. But anyway I like this bird Morse. Feel like I and he was buddies even though I never met him until late last night." Jim blinked slowly as he toyed with the gold toothpick which rested against his vest. "He's interested in joolry, too, Tommy. Me and him had a long talk about pearls and things. He knew all about the Vanduyn robbery; remembered the whole thing the minute I reminded him of it. Uh-huh, me and Eddie Morse got along fine together."

Tommy Braden sought to readjust his battered scheme of things. Above everything, he was a game loser. A thin, twisted smile appeared on his lips.

"I'm a fool, Jim."

"How so, Son?"

"For thinking that you are the idiot you appear to be."

"Gosh! I couldn't be that, could I?"

"Hardly. I take it, Jim, that you knew the person to whom Mickey Donley sold the Vanduyn pearls. You located him at this place and followed him here. You discovered that there was considerable mystery about him and also that Edgar Morse was his only intimate acquaintance. You presumed, of course, that Morse was the goat —and so you went straight to that gentleman and warned him against buying any pearls which might be offered. Is that correct?"

Jim grinned in pleased surprise. "Golly! Son, you're clever. How'd you know all that?"

"Just guessing, Jim." He rose heavily. "I'd better travel along, I suppose. I'm mighty glad you're not going to nab the poor fish who tried to pull the deal. You're a white man, Jim Hanvey."

"Shuh! We don't care nothing for that feller. It was just a bit of a business deal with him. Hmm! So you're running up to Chicago, eh?"

"Yes." And then—"Why?"

"Oh! nothin' special. Except that if you should happen to be thinking of cashing a check which somebody might have given you on—well, say the Loop National Bank; I think you'd better change your mind. You see, the feller which gave you that check happens to be a friend of mine and just to avoid embarrassment I suggested to him last night that he should make out the check on a bank where he hasn't got any money. And he kind of seemed to think it was a good idea."

Tommy Braden had the grace to laugh. He clasped Jim Hanvey's hand—

"Thanks for the tip, Jim. You're surely a thoughtful chap. And one of these days we'll try some golf; what do you say?"

"We sure will, Tommy—unless it turns out that I ain't got sense enough to learn the darn game."

EDMUND SNELL

FARRAR FITS IN

It was about eleven o'clock on a September night that Teddy Farrar, late of the Indian Police, drove into the thickest patch of fog he had as yet encountered and jammed on both brakes simultaneously.

The *Jupiter Six,* hood up, slid to a standstill on the tarred surface of a narrow lane and remained there, ticking over placidly, while Farrar climbed out.

Cursing inwardly, he stepped into a clump of moist grass and out of it again, groped his way round the nose of the thing into the mist-enshrouded fairway and ran slap into the girl. He had no idea she was there.

"I—I'm really frightfully sorry," he said, addressing a vague, shadowy form that might have been a wraith. And then he added, rather irrelevantly: "I seem to have lost my way."

"You trod on my toe!"

There was a note of pain in her voice.

"I say! I'm really——"

"Oh! don't bother to apologize. I know you couldn't help it. Is that your car?"

"It is. I've just been over to Chichester, playing cricket for Morton-Blade's eleven. Got horribly whacked too! We had a bit of a jamboree afterwards. I pushed off early, making for Milford, don't you know, and ran slap into this confounded mist. You don't know where there's an inn round here where I could put up?"

He could see her quite clearly now, a slim figure with a silk shawl thrown over the shoulders, standing in the beam of one of his headlights. Her head was shingled and

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nicely poised. Dark eyes, set in a pretty, uncommon face, observed him curiously.

"You're not particular where you put up?" she asked at length.

"Er—no, I suppose not. So long as it's clean and all that, you know."

Another pause.

"Going to town in the morning?"

Farrar laughed.

"Town?—Me? Good Lord, no! As a matter of fact, I'm at a loose end at the moment. I'd meditated blowing into Atwood Races——"

"You're quite near there now."

"I rather imagined so."

Drawing a handkerchief from his sleeve he wiped some moisture from the windscreen. Her next question took him off his balance.

"I wonder if you would do me a favour?"

Farrar frowned. The handkerchief, wet as it was, returned mechanically to his sleeve. It was extraordinary enough to collide with a decently dressed woman at eleven o'clock at night on a deserted country road—queerer still be asked favours! He wondered if she were going to touch him for money.

"Well," he retorted, smiling a trifle awkwardly, "it—er—it rather depends what the favour is, doesn't it?"

She came a step closer and, above the all-pervading odour of dampness, there floated to his nostrils a perfume that was distinctly alluring. He was getting little details now; glimpses of shapely, silk-encased legs, the matt surface of dance-shoes, sections of pale blue frock showing between the long silk fringes of her shawl.

"Would you mind driving me to Nettleworth Station to meet my husband. I am expecting him by the last train."

A blob of water, descending from an overhanging branch, landed between Farrar's collar and his neck.

"Damn!" he said aloud. It was addressed to the branch and the water, the general sense of discomfort that the

incident had brought about. It served to cover the entire situation. Fate, that had carried him on to the fringes of what had promised to be a romantic adventure, had deprived it of its romance by this sudden trotting-in of a husband!

"My dear lady!" he expostulated. "The sole reason you found me standing here was because I couldn't see to drive another inch. I've no more idea where I am than——"

She pushed past him into the car.

"I'll drive," she declared calmly. "The mist's cleared a lot while we've been talking and I know the road like a book. Get in!"

Teddy Farrar got in.

Slamming the door after him, he watched her running her slim, beringed fingers over the dash-board as if she were playing the piano. Strictly speaking, he had never allowed anyone to drive the *Jupiter* other than himself and the man who had brought it from the works. He had got it into his head she was joking. If he had thought for one moment she meditated piloting the thing he would have stopped her and taken her place.

"I see," she was murmuring. "It's fearfully simple. Right-hand change, too. I like a right-hand change. D'you mind giving me a cigarette?"

"Well I'm hanged!" thought Farrar, and found his case. "They're just gaspers," he said aloud.

"Never mind. I like gaspers. Got a match?"

The cigarette, imprisoned by her lips, moved up and down as she spoke. He lit one for himself afterwards. He felt that he wanted it! The gear snicked softly into first, a delightfully small shoe eased the pressure on the clutch-pedal, and the *Jupiter* Six took the road as easily as he had ever known her. She was in second now . . . in top.

"A nice 'bus!" remarked the astonishing young lady.

"I suppose she is—rather."

"You don't mind—do you?"

"Oh, no!" lied Farrar; "not in the least!"

They drew out of the hollow into a patch of clear road. It seemed to be clear everywhere now. He bit his lip. If he had only known this he could have been well on the way to Milford and bed.

His fair companion let fall a cylinder of ash and pointed to a streak of yellow flame away over to the right.

"There she is—coming now. We shall just do it."

She jabbed on some more acceleration. Looking apprehensively at the speedometer, he realized that they were doing fifty-seven—fifty-eight—sixty. . . . A rabbit, looking snow-white in the beam, scampered across the track. They took a corner—an obtuse bend sheltered by trees—without any appreciable decrease in speed. A stone flicked up and hit the under-side of a wing with a vicious *tang*.

"Doesn't she answer beautifully?" demanded the girl.

"Glad you think so!"

"You're not annoyed with me?"

"Annoyed? Oh, dear no!"

"I suppose it was rather risky, but I knew I could do it—and there's never anything on the road at this time of night."

They came to a double row of dingy cottages, a closed railway crossing and the gleaming lights of a signal-box. They had stopped and she was out in the road before he had gathered his senses.

"Come on!" she cried, as if she had known him all her life. "She'll be in in a minute. I'm going straight on to the platform. Get a couple of tickets* on the way. I haven't my purse."

Farrar didn't hurry himself. Their breathless flight through the night air had been exhilarating in all conscience, but it hadn't exactly given him his bearings. This modern young woman, who distributed cigarette-ash all over the upholstery and monopolised strangers' steering-wheels with scarcely so much as "by your leave," appeared to regard him in the light of a taxi-driver! With the question of a bed for the night still unsettled, he was

* Arrival-Platform admission.

expected to transport her, her husband, and any old suitcases he chose to bring with him, to the spot where he had first found her! It struck him as being pretty cool.

Stumbling up the stairs to the station, he jabbed coppers into a red machine. Halfway along the platform he ran into her again, the only other soul along that line of lighted windows being an aged porter in search of newspapers.

She seemed perplexed, annoyed.

"Now, isn't that just too bad," she complained breathlessly. "He hasn't come!"

Farrar stared.

"Hasn't come?" he echoed.

"No, and he promised faithfully. Isn't that just like a man!"

He moistened his lips.

"Shall I tell you what I think, young woman," he asserted, peering down at her: "I don't believe you ever had a husband. I don't believe he ever promised to come down. For some reason best known to yourself, you've been pulling my leg——"

A ripple of deep, contralto laughter passed her lips. She slipped an arm into his and began pulling him towards the exit.

"Please don't stand there, trying to be dramatic. We know he isn't here, don't we?"

"Unless he's got drunk—and gone to sleep!"

"George doesn't drink——"

"That's all you know! A fellow who promises to come down by the last train and then goes back on his word is capable of anything—that is, of course, if he exists at all."

At the foot of the stairs she turned to him.

"But you don't understand. It's all so stupid. Don't you see? I must have a husband. People will think it so funny——"

"Well, let 'em think! If you really had a husband and he lost the train, it's quite easy to explain——"

She was still clinging to his arm, looking up at him.

He saw her face for an instant, white and extraordinarily attractive, illuminated by a solitary station light. The porter shuffled across the boards above them—and the light vanished.

"Help me out!"

"Eh?"

"Be a sport and help me out. Come back with me to *The Warren* and say you're George St. Maur. Say you changed your mind and drove down. They won't be any the wiser. I'm in an awful hole!"

He let fall the end of his cigarette and put his foot on it. This extraordinary adventure was like a journey in a switch-back car: It took you up and dropped you . . . took you up again. He was on the up-grade now. He must watch for the next drop.

"Where—where exactly do you propose that I should sleep?"

He put it as delicately as he could.

"We shall have separate rooms, of course, with a bathroom between. You can lock your door if you like."

"I shall. You can bet your life on that!"

She laughed again.

"You're not very complimentary, are you?"

"No—and I'm not taking any chances! I suppose I'm as game for a bit of good, honest sport as the next man, but matrimonial complications give me the cold shivers. I mean, it is a bit on the cool side, isn't it? You bump into a casual stranger in the road, borrow his car, drive it on a wild-goose-chase after an imaginary . . . I say! I suppose he is imaginary?"

"Need we bother about that? I'm not going to compromise you, if that's what you think."

He rubbed his chin.

"I'm not so sure about that! Supposing *he* were to do what you're going to tell them I've done? Supposing he were to turn up by car, just as we——"

"He won't," she assured him hastily. "Let's get back to the car. I'm cold."

Farrar wasn't risking any repetition of the journey out. He got to the wheel first—and stuck there.

"So you're Mrs. St. Maur?" he insinuated, feeling for his pipe. "What do I call you?"

"Dagni."

"Dagni!—Never heard of it."

"It's Swedish. My mother was Swedish."

"Dagni, eh? I must jot that down. I've a ghastly memory for names. I'm George St. Maur, what? I haven't told you my *maiden* name, by the by. It's Farrar, Edward Farrar, known to his associates as Teddy! Late Indian Police, don't you know."

"Police!" murmured the girl. "How funny!"

"How? funny?"

"Oh! I don't know. It sounded funny; that's all. Don't start up yet. I want to tell you something."

"I fancy you'd better. It's a trifle awkward starting our married life in the middle, so to speak. I'm entitled to know something of our past. Do we get on—or don't we? Are we supposed to live in each other's arms—or at each other's throat? I mean it's all very important——"

She glanced at her hands which were now clasped in her lap.

"We're frightfully good pals. We were married in Paris—last week. Now, please don't interrupt. We are guests at a very small house-party given for the third year running at *The Warren* by Felix Rosenbaum, the financier."

She began tabulating the guests on her fingers.

"Mrs. Rosenbaum will be there, of course. Then there's Captain Daudeney and Mrs. Daudeney, Sir Oscar and Lady Blare, Mr. and Miss Alderson—and ourselves. With the exception of the Aldersons and ourselves, the party is almost the same as it was last year and the year before. People have dropped out, I mean, but we are the only newcomers. Those who have dropped out have done so for a very good reason: They were robbed, while at *The Warren,* of pretty well everything of value they possessed!"

Farrar started.

"Look here!" he expostulated; "d'you mean to tell me——"

"Please be quiet a moment. This year's party is rather in the nature of a stunt. The place is surrounded by detectives and policemen in plain clothes. Not a single piece of jewellery is being left in the bedrooms while the occupants are away. Tonight, for example, it's all being worn. Mrs. Rosenbaum's glittering with diamonds like a candelabra! and old Miss Alderson's emeralds are well in evidence. Really, of course it's a trap. The thief, whoever he is, has sent a communication threatening to come again, and Mr. Rosenbaum's all out to catch him.—Thrilling, isn't it?"

Farrar favoured her with a sickly smile.

"Oh, frightfully!"

"Some people," she pursued, as if unconscious of the interruption, "say that the house is haunted. That's rubbish, of course. Another theory is that the place has secret hiding-places in the walls. That's nonsense, too, because it's altogether too modern.—You can start up now, if you like."

Farrar complied.

They had reached the bend again when he spoke. He more than suspected that there was a catch in it somewhere. The switchback-car was on the down-grade again!

"You say the place is seething with detectives. Did you have to get a pass-out, as it were, to go in search of this precious husband of yours?"

"Why, yes. That's partly why I had to take one back with me. At a time like this it's rather funny for people to lose trains."

"Yes," agreed Farrar coldly. "That's precisely how it struck *me!* What do we do? Do you pinch the boodle while I drive off with it in the car, or do I——"

Dagni St. Maur leaned back against the upholstery and positively bellowed.

"My dear, good man! if that isn't the richest thing I've heard for weeks! You talk about barricading your room against me, as if I were the most shameless siren ever—

and then you call me a jewel-thief to my face! What will you take me for next?"

Farrar grinned.

"I should like to be able to answer 'for better or for worse'—only I've done that already, haven't I? Frankly, looking at you quite closely, I don't believe you're either. I think you're as honest as you're beautiful and all that sort of rot! Only, for heaven's sake, come out of the tall grass and show me where I stand."

"I will—presently," returned Dagni demurely. "We're here now. I'll hop out and open the gates."

She hopped out, leaving the door standing open. Farrar closed it softly. He had made up his mind. He liked the girl all right, liked her immensely, but the yarn she had told him in the car was a bit too steep. Now he came to think of it, he had read in the papers somewhere about a house near the Atwood Race-Course being robbed two years in succession. Possibly this was the place, possibly it was being robbed again. Anyway, he didn't mean to be in it. He shoved into reverse and began to back towards the hedge. His nose was pointing Chichesterwards and he had to turn.

A voice hailed him from the darkness, a heavy, uncultured voice which appeared to bear out a part of the girl's story.

"Come along, Mr. St. Maur! This way, please!"

So they knew his name already!

Halting, half across the road, he saw white gateposts a sweep of yellow drive culminating in the illuminated interior of a garage of large dimensions. At least two other cars were housed there already. The appearance of three stalwart forms in the road showed him he had manoeuvred a trifle too late. He bowed to the inevitable and drove in. Halfway up the drive he caught himself grinning. He could have sworn that each of those shadowy sentinels had saluted him as he passed!

"They think I'm a celebrity," he thought. "Mixing me up with *Old Moore* of *Old Moore's Almanac!*"

A man-servant held the door for him and helped him

to alight; another, more soberly clad, hooked out his suitcase from the back and paused respectfully, waiting for him to follow. He could tell at a glance that gratuities at *The Warren* were going to exceed the bill he had anticipated at the local pub! Under the circumstances, he was glad that the jamboree at Chichester had necessitated evening-dress. He wondered what sort of figure he would cut at breakfast on the morrow in cricketing flannels!

The hall was oak-panelled and looked expensive. His room on the first-floor was luxurious.

"You can leave the bag," he explained to the man. "I can't remember at the moment where I put the key."

The man, white-faced, obsequious, too obsequious Farrar thought, bowed and withdrew. Farrar hoped he had not guessed that he was minus pyjamas!

He crawled out presently to find Dagni St. Maur on the landing.

"Now, George darling," she laughed, "don't make a mess of things, whatever you do!"

He pressed the arm she slipped in to his against his side.

"Not on your life, Dagni old thing! I'm up to my neck in it now and I'm making no stipulations. Only—if there does happen to be an odd spot lying about anywhere handylike, you might lead me to it before we go in. It'd help matters a whole lot!"

The lounge was immense, thick-carpeted, its walls papered in stuff that resembled studded green leather. His first glance took in deep, expensive chairs, enormous alabaster bowls suspended from a tinted ceiling through which filtered a pleasant diffused light; auxiliary lights along the sides of the room reflecting in silver fittings; old silver branched candle-sticks placed everywhere on well-polished furniture and fitted with fashionable, tapering coloured candles. In the centre of the room a group of people were gathered round a large table, playing roulette. He had heard their laughter from the hall: It stopped as he came in.

Dagni presented him.

Rosenbaum, stout, neckless, very jovial and very Semitic,

offered him a flabby hand. Mrs. Rosenbaum, equally so, gave him another. The extent of her *candelabra* staggered him. Sir Oscar and Lady Blare, less stout but obviously opulent, bowed to him. Captain Daudeney, hawk-profiled and like a rake, bowed too. Mrs. Daudeney, passée, fair-haired and artificial, giggled stupidly.

"So this is your husband, Mrs. St. Maur! We began to think he was never coming!"

Mr. Alderson, a tall, thick set man, with broad, clean-shaven face and close-cropped grey hair, gave him a supercilious stare and turned back to the game. Miss Alderson was more polite. Her lean neck was swathed in emeralds, which exuded a brilliance that accentuated the hard lines of a weak, birdlike face and made her appear positively bilious.

"Now I think you know everybody," purred Mrs. Rosenbaum. "I hope you've had something to eat?"

Farrar grinned.

"Plenty, thanks. Got it in the restaurant-car on the way down."

"Didn't know there was a restaurant-car on that train," boomed out Alderson suddenly.

Farrar was beginning to hate Alderson.

He got separated from Dagni and squeezed into the game, wedged firmly between Miss Alderson and Lady Blare. Nobody seemed to be playing high. He was glad of that because the jamboree at Chichester had somewhat reduced his exchequer. At the end of half-an-hour he was ten shillings down. His luck changed and he was level and a bit over. About one o'clock the servant who had showed him his room thrust a head between Miss Alderson and himself and asked him to say *"When!"*

Farrar was in the act of saying "When!" when, without warning, every light in the place went suddenly out.

A splash of liquid hit Farrar's check and he heard something smash on the carpet.

"My word!" breathed the man in his ear. "It's 'im right enough! We're in for it!"

At least three women screamed in unison. People began

getting up and chairs falling over. Rosenbaum was yelling for lights. Farrar struck a match and somebody—he thought it was Alderson—promptly blew it out. As he fumbled for another, he heard a queer, choking cry at his elbow and three distinct, metallic noises, like pliers shearing through a wire. He struck another and shielded it with his hand. Before it could share the fate of the first its pallid ray had shown him Miss Alderson unconscious in her chair and a lean white hand, from which hung a cluster of bright green drops, slipping away into the gloom!

The match flickered out as he grabbed at the hand—and missed.

"Look out, you chaps!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "He's got the emeralds—moving towards the window. . . . Stop him!"

"Eh?—What's that?—Where?" bellowed a heavy voice. He thought it was Sir Oscar's. "Why doesn't somebody bring a light? What about those things in the sticks?"

"Not my precious candles!" shrieked Mrs. Rosenbaum. "There are others in the kitchen. Henry! Henry!—Where on earth has the man gone? He was here a moment ago.—Abraham! Why don't you call the police?"

Farrar, charging after the phantom hand, lunged into three people in succession. He tripped over the third and fell headlong. They were sorting themselves out when the light came on again and he found himself sitting on the carpet, facing a disgruntled Henry. The servant was rubbing a bruised forehead ruefully, while his free fingers closed over the base of a silver, branched candle-stick with two tapered candles still intact.

"Why didn't you light 'em, you fool, if you had 'em?" he growled.

The man eyed him blankly.

"Didn't dare, Sir. Missus's orders."

He carried the thing to a corner-cupboard and set it down.

Mr. Rosenbaum was just coming in at the doorway. He beamed at his wife.

"Only a blown fuse, my dear," he said. "Funny it should have happened like that!"

His glance fell on the prostrate Miss Alderson and his jaw dropped.

Her brother was bending over her.

"It's all right, Rosenbaum," he assured him. "She's only fainted. Who was that sang out about the emeralds? They're gone right enough!"

The roulette table, with the cloth all twisted out of place and everybody's winnings mixed with everybody else's, looked forlorn and dejected. Broad patches of fluid, spilled and not yet soaked in, lent a still more disconsolate air. People stood about awkwardly. Miss Alderson came to, screamed wildly and went off again. The police came in and searched everybody. A plain-clothes-man relieved Henry of his champagne-cutters and handed them back again. The door was locked while the rest of the house was searched; it was opened again and they were ordered to bed.

Pausing at the foot of the stairs, Farrar overheard something the inspector confided to Rosenbaum.

"Whoever it is, he's in the house, sir. I'll wager anything on that. Nobody's got in from the outside and nobody's got out since it happened."

"You said that last year," the other reminded him, "and the year before."

"Well—and yet I still say it. And where the thief is we shall find the jewels."

Farrar winked broadly and smiled. He was inclined to doubt that last statement very much!

He tapped at Dagni's door.

"Hullo, old thing!" he called softly. "Can I come in?"

He heard a scuffling sound from the far side.

"Just a moment."

Thirty seconds and the door opened.

The girl looked out.

"What d'you want?"

"To come in and talk to you. Are you respectable?"

"More or less. What do you want to say?"

"Heaps of things."

He shouldered his way past her and sat down on the bed. He sat down on something hard, pushed under the bedclothes. Diving in a hand, he drew out a very businesslike automatic.

He showed it her, balancing it on his palm.

"Dagni, as your husband I demand to know what this means!"

She tried to snatch it away, but he swept it behind him.

"Give it to me—*please.*"

He shook his head.

"Is it yours?"

"No; it's George's—the real George's, I mean. He didn't like my coming here. He gave it me for protection."

Farrar drew out the clip.

"Fully loaded, eh? Well, it's no use to me."

He passed it over.

"Now, look here," he continued presently; "I don't know how that affair struck you just now, but it just tickled me to death. It looks to me as if the whole thing's what the Yanks call a frame-up and I'd give a lot to know just how many of us sitting around that table were in it. You know I wasn't and I'm still trying to think the same about you. I'll admit it's difficult——"

Dagni leaned against a dressing-table of inlaid mahogany, smoking and watching him with an amused smile.

"Why such amazing faith in *me?*"

"Oh! I don't know. I suppose I like you." He brought a hand heavily down on to his knee. "Dagni! I've never seen such a bunch of crooks in my life—East or West—and I'm sorry a decent girl like yourself has anything to do with them. I'm not sure about *Rosie;* but Mrs. Rosenbaum's in the deal and at least one of the others—probably a man. Henry's the tool——"

At that moment Dagni St. Maur planked herself on the bed beside him and brought her head very close to his own.

"You're rather a dear, aren't you," she whispered. "Quite

a good-looking man, too—for a husband!—Tell me what else you've discovered?"

The revolver lay on the eiderdown beside her. He possessed himself of one of her hands and began playing with the fingers—opening and shutting them as if they were bridge-markers.

"They're getting over-confident—these people," he mused. "They've one card up their sleeves and they think it the highest in the pack. This getting the police here time after time isn't strategy: It's confounded cheek. And the police know it as well as I do."

Dagni positively winked.

"True, O King! What next?"

"The hiding-place is their trump-card. Perhaps they change it every year; perhaps they're so sure of it's not being discovered that they don't. The stones remain hidden a long time. Presently, when the excitement has died down, they're dug out and spirited to the continent, recut perhaps and sold."

He picked up the pistol again and eyed it queerly.

"Do you know where that hiding-place is, Dagni St. Maur?"

She shook her head.

"That was George's job—the real George's, I mean. I was only here as an ornament. Rosenbaum arranged it with headquarters——"

His brain reeled.

"Gad! I might have known it. So you're a detective! They had 'em in the house and still nobody saw!—I wonder who doped George and saw that he didn't come?"

He rose suddenly and tip-toed to the door. Opening it softly, he glanced along the passage. He closed it again and came back.

"Anybody there?" she asked.

Farrar nodded.

"Henry—picking up shoes—and any information he can glean at the same time! Look here, Dagni: I know where those stones are. What'll you give me if I take you to 'em?"

She coloured beneath his gaze.

"I don't know, Teddy." (He wondered whether it was a slip, or whether she meant to say that.)—"I'll think it over."

An hour later they slipped down stairs. Farrar was not certain but, in the blackness behind them, he thought he heard a handle turn stealthily. Making sure that the heavy curtains were drawn across the windows, he led her to the corner-cupboard where he and Henry had had their last brief interview. Reaching down the double candle-stick, he thrust it bodily into her arms.

"Try 'em both," he enjoined. "I fancy they're hollow —both of them. They didn't break when they fell with Henry. I noticed that particularly."

He reached the door in time to switch on the light and jab Dagni's automatic into the stomach of an armed man who had just arrived.

"Captain Daudeney!—So it's you and Henry, is it?— Put 'em up!"

And Captain Daudeney obeyed.

Farrar relieved him of his gun.

"—And Mrs. Rosenbaum, eh?" he insinuated quietly.

The hawk-faced man scowled.

"The Blares are out of it and Miss Alderson, if you want to know. All the rest of us were in the swim."

"With the exception of Miss St. Maur and myself!"

"Oh! you were tecs! We knew that all the time. *Rosie's* been wondering how *you* got here."

Farrar smiled.

"That's rather a long story," he said.

Over on the far side of the room a pair of hollow, coloured candles, minus their covers, were dropping into Dagni St. Maur's lap a double shower of bright green stones that glittered in the light. . . .

* * * * * * * * *

Somewhere about noon, in a singularly deserted house, Teddy Farrar, lathering himself before the glass, paused to hammer on Dagni's door.

"Hullo!" came a sleepy voice. "Who is it?"

"Teddy speaking. I say! these are top-hole razors of Rosenbaum's. Wonder how much he gave for 'em."

A ripple of laughter.

"Did you wake me up to tell me that?"

"Not altogether. As a matter of fact, I've been thinking. I usually do when I shave. Er—the absent George wasn't your husband, was he?"

"Good heavens, no! Why?"

"Oh! I don't know. I'll talk to you about it one of these days."

The noise of a vigorous stropping followed, serving as a bass accompaniment to a whistled air from *Rose Marie*. The stropping ceased.

"Teddy!"

"Hullo?"

"I'm listening now!"

Farrar grinned at his lathered reflection in the glass.

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

THE PATHOLOGIST TO THE RESCUE

"I HOPE," said I, as I looked anxiously out of our window up King's Bench Walk, "that our friend, Foxley, will turn up to time, or I shall lose the chance of hearing his story. I must be in court by half-past eleven. The telegram said that he was a parson, didn't it?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "The Reverend Arthur Foxley."

"Then perhaps this may be he. There is a parson crossing from the Row in this direction, only he has a girl with him. He didn't say anything about a girl, did he?"

"No. He merely asked for the appointment. However," he added, as he joined me at the window and watched the couple approaching with their eyes apparently fixed on the number above our portico, "this is evidently our client, and punctual to the minute."

In response to the old-fashioned flourish on our little knocker, he opened the inner door and invited the clergyman and his companion to enter; and while the mutual introductions were in progress, I looked critically at our new clients. Mr. Foxley was a typical and favourable specimen of his class: a handsome, refined, elderly gentleman, prim as to his speech, suave and courteous in bearing, with a certain engaging simplicity of manner which impressed me very favourably. His companion I judged to be a parishioner, for she was what ladies are apt to describe as "not quite"; that is to say, her social level appeared to appertain to the lower strata of the middle-class. But she

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was a fine, strapping girl, very sweet-faced and winsome, quiet and gentle in manner and obviously in deep trouble, for her clear grey eyes—fixed earnestly, almost devouringly, on Thorndyke—were reddened and swimming with unshed tears.

"We have sought your aid, Dr. Thorndyke," the clergyman began, "on the advice of my friend, Mr. Brodribb, who happened to call on me on some legal business. He assured me that you would be able to solve our difficulties if it were humanly possible, so I have come to lay those difficulties before you. I pray to God that you may be able to help us, for my poor young friend here, Miss Markham, is in a most terrible position, as you will understand when I tell you that her future husband, a most admirable young man named Robert Fletcher, is in the custody of the police on a charge of murder."

Thorndyke nodded gravely, and the clergyman continued:

"I had better tell you exactly what has happened. The dead man is one Joseph Riggs, a maternal uncle of Fletcher's, a strange, eccentric man, solitary, miserly, and of a violent, implacable temper. He was quite well-to-do, though penurious and haunted constantly by an absurd fear of poverty. His nephew, Robert, was apparently his only known relative, and, under his will, was his sole heir. Recently, however, Robert has become engaged to my friend, Miss Lilian, and this engagement was violently opposed by his uncle, who had repeatedly urged him to make, what he called a profitable marriage. For Miss Lilian is a dowerless maiden—dowerless save for those endowments with which God has been pleased to enrich her, and which her future husband has properly prized above mere material wealth. However, Riggs, declared, in his brutal way, that he was not going to leave his property to the husband of a shop-woman, and that Robert might look out for a wife with money or be struck out of his will.

"The climax was reached yesterday when Robert, in response to a peremptory summons, went to see his uncle. Mr. Riggs was in a very intractable mood. He demanded

that Robert should break off his engagement unconditionally and at once, and when Robert bluntly insisted on his right to choose his own wife the old man worked himself up into a furious rage, shouting, cursing, using the most offensive language and even uttering threats of personal violence. Finally, he drew his gold watch from his pocket and laid it with its chain on the table; then, opening a drawer, he took out a bundle of bearer bonds and threw them down by the watch.

"'There, my friend,' said he, 'that is your inheritance. That is all you will get from me, living or dead. Take it and go, and don't let me ever set eyes on you again.'

"At first Robert refused to accept the gift, but his uncle became so violent that eventually, for peace' sake, he took the watch and the bonds, intending to return them later, and went away. He left at half-past five, leaving his uncle alone in the house."

"How was that?" Thorndyke asked. "Was there no servant?"

"Mr. Riggs kept no resident servant. The young woman who did his housework came at half-past eight in the morning and left at half-past four. Yesterday she waited until five to get tea ready, but then, as the uproar in the sitting-room was still unabated, she thought it best to go. She was afraid to go in to lay the tea-things.

"This morning, when she arrived at the house, she found the front door unlocked, as it always was during the day. On entering, her attention was at once attracted by two or three little pools of blood on the floor of the hall, or passage. Somewhat alarmed by this, she looked into the sitting-room, and finding no one there, and being impressed by the silence in the house, she went along the passage to a back room—a sort of study or office, which was usually kept locked when Mr. Riggs was not in it. Now, however, it was unlocked and the door was ajar; so having first knocked and receiving no answer, she pushed open the door and looked in; and there, to her horror, she saw her employer lying on the floor, apparently dead, with

a wound on the side of his head and a pistol on the floor by his side.

"Instantly she turned and rushed out of the house, and she was running up the street in search of a policeman when she encountered me at a corner and burst out with her dreadful tidings. I walked with her to the police station, and as we went she told me what had happened on the previous afternoon. Naturally, I was profoundly shocked and also alarmed, for I saw that—rightly or wrongly—suspicion must immediately fall on Robert Fletcher. The servant, Rose Turnmill, took it for granted that he had murdered her master; and when we found the station inspector and Rose had repeated her statement to him, it was evident that he took the same view.

"With him and a sergeant, we went back to the house; but on the way we met Mr. Brodribb, who was staying at the 'White Lion' and had just come out for a walk. I told him, rapidly, what had occurred and begged him to come with us, which, with the inspector's consent, he did; and as we walked I explained to him the awful position that Robert Fletcher might be placed in, and asked him to advise me what to do. But, of course, there was nothing to be said or done until we had seen the body and knew whether any suspicion rested on Robert.

"We found the man Riggs lying, as Rose had said. He was quite dead, cold and stiff. There was a pistol wound on the right temple, and a pistol lay on the floor at his right side. A little blood—but not much—had trickled from the wound and lay in a small pool on the oil-cloth. The door of an iron safe was open and a bunch of keys hung from the lock; and on a desk one or two share certificates were spread out. On searching the dead man's pockets it was found that the gold watch which the servant told us he usually carried was missing, and when Rose went to the bedroom to see if it was there, it was nowhere to be found.

"Apart from the watch, however, the appearances suggested that the man had taken his own life. But against this view was the blood on the hall floor. The dead man

appeared to have fallen at once from the effects of the shot, and there had been very little bleeding. Then how came the blood in the hall? The inspector decided that it could not have been the blood of the deceased; and when we examined it and saw that there were several little pools and that they seemed to form a track towards the street door, he was convinced that the blood had fallen from some person who had been wounded and was escaping from the house. And, under the circumstances, he was bound to assume that that person was Robert Fletcher; and on that assumption, he despatched the sergeant forthwith to arrest Robert.

"On this I held a consultation with Mr. Brodribb, who pointed out that the case turned principally on the blood in the hall. If it was the blood of deceased, and the absence of the watch could be explained, a verdict of suicide could be accepted. But if it was the blood of some other person, that fact would point to murder. The question he said, would have to be settled, if possible, and his advice to me, if I believed Robert to be innocent—which, from my knowledge of him, I certainly did—was this: Get a couple of small, clean, labelled bottles from a chemist and —with the inspector's consent—put in one a little of the blood from the hall and in the other some of the blood of the deceased. Seal them both in the inspector's presence and mine and take them up to Dr. Thorndyke. If it is possible to answer the question, Are they or are they not from the same person? he will answer it.

"Well, the inspector made no objection, so I did what he advised. And here are the specimens. I trust they may tell us what we want to know."

Here Mr. Foxley took from his attaché-case a small cardboard box, and opening it, displayed two little wide-mouthed bottles carefully packed in cotton wool. Lifting them out tenderly, he placed them on the table before Thorndyke. They were both neatly corked, sealed—with Brodribb's seal, as I noticed—and labelled; the one inscribed "Blood of Joseph Riggs," and the other "Blood of unknown origin," and both signed "Arthur Foxley" and

dated. At the bottom of each was a small mass of gelatinous blood-clot.

Thorndyke looked a little dubiously at the two bottles, and addressing the clergyman, said:

"I am afraid Mr. Brodribb has rather over-estimated our resources. There is no known method by which the blood of one person can be distinguished with certainty from that of another."

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Mr. Foxley. "How disappointing! Then these specimens are useless, after all?"

"I won't say that; but it is in the highest degree improbable that they will yield any information. You must build no expectations on them."

"But you will examine them and see if anything is to be gleaned," the parson urged, persuasively.

"Yes, I will examine them. But you realize that if they should yield any evidence, that evidence might be unfavourable?"

"Yes; Mr. Brodribb pointed that out, but we are willing to take the risk, and so, I may say, is Robert Fletcher, to whom I put the question."

"Then you have seen Mr. Fletcher since the discovery?"

"Yes, I saw him at the police station after his arrest. It was then that he gave me—and also the police—the particulars that I have repeated to you. He had to make a statement, as the dead man's watch and the bonds were found in his possession."

"With regard to the pistol. Has it been identified?"

"No. It is an old-fashioned derringer which no one has ever seen before, so there is no evidence as to whose property it was."

"And as to those share certificates which you spoke of as lying on the desk. Do you happen to remember what they were?"

"Yes, they were West African mining shares; Abusum Pa-pa was the name, I think."

"Then," said Thorndyke, "Mr. Riggs had been losing money. The Abusum Pa-pa Company has just gone into

liquidation. Do you know if anything had been taken from the safe?"

"It is impossible to say, but apparently not, as there was a good deal of money in the cash-box, which we unlocked and inspected. But we shall hear more tomorrow at the inquest, and I trust we shall hear something there from you. But in any case I hope you will attend to watch the proceedings on behalf of poor Fletcher. And if possible, to be present at the autopsy at eleven o'clock. Can you manage that?"

"Yes. And I shall come down early enough to make an inspection of the premises if the police will give the necessary facilities."

Mr. Foxley thanked him effusively, and when the details as to the trains had been arranged, our clients rose to depart. Thorndyke shook their hands cordially, and as he bade farewell to Miss Markham he murmured a few words of encouragement. She looked up at him gratefully and appealingly as she naïvely held his hand.

"You will try to help us, Dr. Thorndyke, won't you?" she urged. "And you will examine that blood very, very carefully. Promise that you will. Remember that poor Robert's life may hang upon what you can tell about it."

"I realize that, Miss Markham," he replied gently, "and I promise you that the specimens shall be most thoroughly examined; and further, that no stone shall be left unturned in my endeavours to bring the truth to light."

At his answer, spoken with infinite kindliness and sympathy, her eyes filled and she turned away with a few broken words of thanks, and the good clergyman—himself not unmoved by the little episode—took her arm and led her to the door.

"Well," I remarked as their retreating footsteps died away, "old Brodribb's enthusiasm seems to have let you in for a queer sort of task; and I notice that you appear to have accepted Fletcher's statement."

"Without prejudice," he replied. "I don't know Fletcher, but the balance of probabilities is in his favour. Still, that

blood-track in the hall is a curious feature. It certainly requires explanation."

"It does, indeed!" I exclaimed, "and you have got to find the explanation! Well, I wish you joy of the job. I suppose you will carry out the farce to the bitter end as you have promised?"

"Certainly," he replied. "But it is hardly a farce, I should have looked the specimens over in any case. One never knows what illuminating fact a chance observation may bring into view."

I smiled sceptically.

"The fact that you are asked to ascertain is that these two samples of blood came from the same person. If there are any means of proving that, they are unknown to me. I should have said it was an impossibility."

"Of course," he rejoined, "you are quite right, speaking academically and in general terms. No method of identifying the blood of individual persons has hitherto been discovered. But yet I can imagine the possibility, in particular and exceptional cases, of an actual, personal identification by means of blood. What does my learned friend think?"

"He thinks that his imagination is not equal to the required effort," I answered; and with that I picked up my brief-bag and went forth to my duties at the courts.

That Thorndyke would keep his promise to poor Lilian Markham was a foregone conclusion, preposterous as the examination seemed. But even my long experience of my colleague's scrupulous conscientiousness had not prepared me for the spectacle which met my eyes when I returned to our chambers. On the table stood the microscope, flanked by three slide-boxes. Each box held six trays, and each tray held six slides—a hundred and eight slides in all!

But why three boxes? I opened one. The slides—carefully mounted blood-films—were labelled "Joseph Riggs." Those in the second box were labelled, "Blood from hall floor." But when I opened the third box, I beheld a collection of empty slides labelled "Robert Fletcher!"

I chuckled aloud. Prodigious! Thorndye was going even

one better than his promise. He was not only going to examine—probably had examined—the two samples produced; he was actually going to collect a third sample for himself!

I picked out one of Mr. Riggs's slides and laid it on the stage of the microscope. Thorndyke seemed to have been using a low-power objective—the inch-and-a-half. After a glance through this, I swung round the nose-piece to the high power. And then I got a further surprise. The brightly-coloured "white" corpuscles showed that Thorndyke had actually been to the trouble of staining the films with eosin! Again I murmured, "Prodigious!" and put the slide back in its box. For, of course, it showed just what one expected: blood—or rather, broken-up blood-clot. From its appearance, I could not even have sworn that it was human blood.

I had just closed the box when Thorndyke entered the room. His quick eye at once noted the changed objective and he remarked:

"I see you have been having a look at the specimens."

"A specimen," I corrected. "Enough is as good as a feast."

"Blessed are they who are easily satisfied," he retorted; and then he added: "I have altered my arrangements, though I needn't interfere with yours. I shall go down to Southaven to-night; in fact, I am starting in a few minutes."

"Why?" I asked.

"For several reasons. I want to make sure of the post-mortem to-morrow morning, I want to pick up any further facts that are available, and finally, I want to prepare a set of blood-films from Robert Fletcher. We may as well make the series complete," he added with a smile, to which I replied by a broad grin.

"Really, Thorndyke," I protested, "I'm surprised at you, at your age, too. She is a nice girl, but she isn't so beautiful as to justify a hundred and eight blood-films."

I accompanied him to the taxi, followed by Polton, who carried his modest luggage, and then returned to speculate

on his probable plan of campaign. For, of course, he had one. His purposive, resolute manner told me that he had seen farther into this case than I had. I accepted that as natural and inevitable. Indeed, I may admit that my disrespectful badinage covered a belief in his powers hardly second even to old Brodribb's. I was, in fact, almost prepared to discover that those preposterous blood-films had, after all, yielded some "illuminating fact" which had sent him hurrying down to Southaven in search of corroboration.

When I alighted from the train, on the following day at a little past noon, I found him waiting on the platform, ready to conduct me to his hotel for an early lunch.

"All goes well, so far," he reported. "I attended the post-mortem, and examined the wound thoroughly. The pistol was held in the right hand not more than two inches from the head; probably quite close, for the skin is scorched and heavily tattooed with black powder grains. I find that Riggs was right-handed. So the *prima facie* probabilities are in favour of suicide; and the recent loss of money suggests a reasonable motive."

"But what about that blood in the hall?"

"Oh, we have disposed of that. I completed the blood-films series last night."

I looked at him quickly to see if he was serious or only playing a facetious return-shot. But his face was as a face of wood.

"You are an exasperating old devil, Thorndyke!" I exclaimed with conviction. Then, knowing that cross-examination would be futile, I asked:

"What are we going to do after lunch?"

"The inspector is going to show us over 'the scene of the tragedy,' as the newspapers would express it."

I noted gratefully that he had reserved this item for me, and dismissed professional topics for the time being, concentrating my attention on the old-world, amphibious streets through which we were walking. There is always something interesting in the aspect of a seaport town, even if it is only a small one like Southaven.

The inspector arrived with such punctuality that he found us still at the table and was easily induced to join us with a cup of coffee and to accept a cigar—administered by Thorndyke, as I suspected, with the object of hindering conversation. I could see that his interest in my colleague was intense and not unmingled with awe, a fact which, in conjunction with the cigar, restrained him from any undue manifestations of curiosity, but not from continuous, though furtive, observation of my friend. Indeed, when we arrived at the late Mr. Riggs's house, I was secretly amused by the close watch that he kept on Thorndyke's movements, unsensational as the inspection turned out to be.

The house, itself, presented very little of interest excepting its picturesque, old-world exterior, which fronted on a quiet by-street and was furnished with a deep bay-window, which—as Thorndyke ascertained—commanded a clear view of the street from end to end. It was a rather shabby, neglected little house, as might have been expected, and our examination of it yielded, so far as I could see, only a single fact of any significance: which was that there appeared to be no connexion whatever between the blood-stain on the study floor and the train of large spots from the middle of the hall to the street door. And on this piece of evidence—definitely unfavourable from our point of view—Thorndyke concentrated his attention when he had made a preliminary survey.

Closely followed by the watchful inspector, he browsed round the little room, studying every inch of the floor between the blood-stain and the door. The latter he examined minutely from top to bottom, especially as to the handle, the jambs, and the lintel. Then he went out into the hall, scrutinizing the floor inch by inch, poring over the walls and even looking behind the framed prints that hung on them. A reflector lamp suspended by a nail on the wall received minute and prolonged attention, as did also a massive lamp-hook screwed into one of the beams of the low ceiling, of which Thorndyke remarked as he stooped to pass under it, that it must have been fixed there by a dwarf.

"Yes," the inspector agreed, "and a fool. A swinging lamp hung on that hook would have blocked the whole fairway. There isn't too much room as it is. What a pity we weren't a bit more careful about footprints in this place. There are plenty of tracks of wet feet here on this oil-cloth; faint, but you could have made them out all right if they hadn't been all on top of one another. There's Mr. Foxley's, the girl's, mine, and the men who carried out the body, but I'm hanged if I can tell which is which. It's a regular mix-up."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is all very confused. But I notice one rather odd thing. There are several faint traces of a large right foot, but I can't see any sign of the corresponding left foot. Can you?"

"Perhaps this is it," said Thorndyke, pointing to a large, vague oval mark. "I have noticed that it seems to occur in some sort of connexion with the big right foot; but I must admit that it is not a very obvious footprint."

"I shouldn't have taken it for a footprint at all, or at any rate, not a human footprint. It is more like the spoor of some big animal."

"It is," Thorndyke agreed; "but whatever it is, it seems to have been here before any of the others arrived. You notice that wherever it occurs, it seems to have been trodden on by some of the others."

"Yes, I had noticed that, and the same is true of the big right foot, so it seems probable that they are connected, as you say. But I am hanged if I can make anything of it. Can you, inspector?"

The inspector shook his head. He could not recognize the mark as a footprint, but he could see very plainly that he had been a fool not to have taken more care to protect the floor.

When the examination of the hall was finished, Thorndyke opened the door and looked at the big, flat doorstep.

"What was the weather like, here, on Wednesday evening?" he asked.

"Showery," the inspector replied; "and there were one or two heavy showers during the night. You were noticing

that there are no blood-tracks on the doorstep. But there wouldn't be in any case; for if a man had come out of this door dropping blood, the blood would have dropped on wet stone and got washed away at once."

Thorndyke admitted the truth of this; and so another item of favourable evidence was extinguished. The overwhelming probability that the blood in the hall was that of some person other than the deceased remained undisturbed; and I could not see that a single fact had been elicited by our inspection of the house that was in any way helpful to our client. Indeed, it appeared to me that there was absolutely no case for the defence, and I even asked myself whether we were not, in fact, merely trying to fudge up a defence for an obviously guilty man. It was not like Thorndyke to do that. But how did the case stand? There was a suggestion of suicide, but a clear possibility of homicide. There was strong evidence that a second person had been in the house, and that person appeared to have received a wound. But a wound suggested a struggle; and the servant's evidence was to the effect that when she left the house a violent altercation was in progress. The deceased was never again seen alive; and the other party to the quarrel had been found with property of the dead man in his possession. Moreover, there was a clear motive for the crime, stupid as that crime was. For the dead man had threatened to revoke his will; but as he had presumably not done so, his death left the will still operative. In short, everything pointed to the guilt of our client, Robert Fletcher.

I had just reached this not very gratifying conclusion when a statement of Thorndyke's shattered my elaborate summing up into impalpable fragments.

"I suppose, sir," said the inspector, "there isn't anything that you would care to tell us, as you are for the defence. But we are not hostile to Fletcher. In fact, he hasn't been charged. He is only being detained in custody until we have heard what turns up at the inquest. I know you have examined that blood that Mr. Foxley took, and Fletcher's blood, too, and you've seen the premises. We have given

all the facilities that we could, and if you could give us any sort of hint that might be useful—well, I should be very much obliged."

Thorndyke reflected for a few moments. Then he replied:

"There is no reason for secrecy in regard to you, inspector, who have been so helpful and friendly, so I will be quite frank. I have examined both samples of blood and Fletcher's, and I have inspected the premises, and what I am able to say definitely is this: the blood in the hall is not the blood of the deceased——"

"Ah!" exclaimed the inspector, "I was afraid it wasn't."

"And it is not the blood of Robert Fletcher."

"Isn't it now! Well, I am glad to hear that."

"Moreover," continued Thorndyke, "it was shed well after nine o'clock at night, probably not earlier than midnight."

"There, now!" the inspector exclaimed, with an admiring glance at Thorndyke, "just think of that. See what it is to be a man of science! I suppose, sir, you couldn't give us any sort of description of the person who dropped that blood in the hall?"

Staggered as I had been by Thorndyke's astonishing statements, I could not repress a grin at the inspector's artless question. But the grin faded rather abruptly as Thorndyke replied in matter-of-fact tones:

"A detailed description is, of course, impossible. I can only sketch out the probabilities. But if you should happen to meet with a negro—a tall negro with a bandaged head or a contused wound of the scalp and a swollen leg—you had better keep your eye on him. The leg which is swollen is probably the left."

The inspector was thrilled; and so was I, for that matter. The thing was incredible; but yet I knew that Thorndyke's amazing deductions were the products of perfectly orthodox scientific methods. Only I could form no sort of guess as to how they had been arrived at. A negro's blood is no different from any other person's, and certainly affords no clue to his height or the condition of his legs. I could

make nothing of it; and as the dialogue and the inspector's note-takings brought us to the little town hall in which the inquest was to be held, I dismissed the puzzle until such time as Thorndyke chose to solve it.

When we entered the town hall we found everything in readiness for the opening of the proceedings. The jury were already in their places and the coroner was just about to take his seat at the head of the long table. We accordingly slipped on to the two chairs that were found for us by the inspector, and the latter took his place behind the jury and facing us. Near to him Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham were seated, and evidently hailed our arrival with profound relief, each of them smiling us a silent greeting. A professional-looking man sitting next to Thorndyke I assumed to be the medical witness, and a rather good-looking young man who sat apart with a police constable I identified as Robert Fletcher.

The evidence of the "common" witnesses who deposed to the general facts, told us nothing that we did not already know, excepting that it was made clear that Fletcher had left his uncle's house not later than seven o'clock and that thereafter until the following morning his whereabouts were known. The medical witness was cautious, and kept an uneasy eye on Thorndyke. The wound which caused the death of deceased might have been inflicted by himself or by some other person. He had originally given the probable time of death as six or seven o'clock on Wednesday evening. He now admitted—in reply to a question from Thorndyke—that he had not taken the temperature of the body, and that the rigidity and other conditions were not absolutely inconsistent with a considerably later time of death. Death might even have occurred after midnight.

In spite of this admission, however, the sum of the evidence tended strongly to implicate Fletcher, and one or two questions from jurymen suggested a growing belief in his guilt. I had no doubt whatever that if the case had been put to the jury at this stage, a unanimous verdict of "wilful murder" would have been the result. But, as the

medical witness returned to his seat, the coroner fixed an inquisitive eye on Thorndyke.

"You have not been summoned as a witness, Dr. Thorndyke," said he, "but I understand that you have made certain investigations in this case. Are you able to throw any fresh light on the circumstances of the death of the deceased, Joseph Riggs?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "I am in a position to give important and material evidence!"

Thereupon he was sworn, and the coroner, still watching him curiously, said:

"I am informed that you have examined samples of the blood of the deceased and the blood which was found in the hall of deceased's house. Did you examine them, and if so, what was the object of the examination?"

"I examined both samples and also samples of the blood of Robert Fletcher. The object was to ascertain whether the blood on the hall floor was the blood of the deceased or of Robert Fletcher."

The coroner glanced at the medical witness, and a faint smile appeared on the face of each.

"And did you," the former asked in a slightly ironical tone, "form any opinion on the subject?"

"I ascertained definitely that the blood in the hall was neither that of the deceased nor that of Robert Fletcher."

The coroner's eyebrows went up, and once more he glanced significantly at the doctor.

"But," he demanded incredulously, "is it possible to distinguish the blood of one person from that of another?"

"Usually it is not, but in certain exceptional cases it is. This happened to be an exceptional case."

"In what respect?"

"It happened," Thorndyke replied, "that the person whose blood was found in the hall suffered from the parasitic disease known as filiariasis. His blood was infested with swarms of a minute worm named *Filaria nocturna.* I have here," he continued, taking out of his research-case the two bottles and the three boxes, "thirty-six mounted specimens of this blood, and in every one of them one or

more of the parasites is to be seen. I have also thirty-six mounted specimens each of the blood of the deceased and the blood of Robert Fletcher. In not one of these specimens is a single parasite to be found. Moreover, I have examined Robert Fletcher and the body of the deceased, and can testify that no sign of filarial disease was to be discovered in either. Hence it is certain that the blood found in the hall was not the blood of either of these two persons."

The ironic smile had faded from the coroner's face. He was evidently deeply impressed, and his manner was quite deferential as he asked:

"Do these very remarkable observations of yours lead to any further inferences?"

"Yes," replied Thorndyke. "They render it certain that this blood was shed not earlier than nine o'clock and probably nearer midnight."

"Really!" the astonished coroner exclaimed. "Now, how is it possible to fix the time in that exact manner?"

"By inference from the habits of the parasite," Thorndyke explained. "This particular filaria is distributed by the mosquito, and its habits are adapted to the habits of the mosquito. During the day, the worms are not found in the blood; they remain hidden in the tissues of the body. But about nine o'clock at night they begin to migrate from the tissues into the blood, and remain in the blood during the hours when the mosquitoes are active. Then, about six o'clock in the morning, they leave the blood and migrate back into the tissues.

"There is another very similar species—*Filaria diurna*—which has exactly opposite habits, adapted to day-flying suctorial insects. It appears in the blood about eleven in the forenoon and goes back into the tissues about six o'clock in the evening."

"Astonishing!" exclaimed the coroner. "Wonderful! By the way, the parasites that you found could not, I suppose, have been *Filaria diurna?*"

"No," Thorndyke replied. "The time excludes that possibility. The blood was certainly shed after six. They were

undoubtedly *nocturna,* and the large numbers found suggest a late hour. The parasites come out of the tissues very gradually, and it is only about midnight that they appear in the blood in really large numbers."

"That is very important," said the coroner. "But does this disease affect any particular class of persons?"

"Yes," Thorndyke replied. "As the disease is confined to tropical countries, the sufferers are naturally residents of the tropics, and nearly always natives. In West Africa, for instance, it is common among the negroes but practically unknown among the white residents."

"Should you say that there is a distinct probability that this unknown person was a negro?"

"Yes. But apart from the filariæ, there is direct evidence that he was. Searching for some cause of the bleeding, I noticed a lamphook screwed into the ceiling and low enough to strike a tall man's head. I examined it closely, and observed on it a dark, shiny mark, like a blood-smear, and one or two short coiled hairs which I recognized as the scalp-hairs of a negro. I have no doubt that the unknown man is a negro, and that he has a wound of the scalp."

"Does filarial disease produce any effects that can be recognized?"

"Frequently it does. One of the commonest effects produced by *Filaria nocturna,* especially among negroes, is the condition known as elephantiasis. This consists of an enormous swelling of the extremities, most usually of one leg, including the foot; whence the name. The leg and foot look like those of an elephant. As a matter of fact, the negro who was in the hall suffered from elephantiasis of the left leg. I observed prints of the characteristically deformed foot on the oil-cloth covering the floor."

Thorndyke's evidence was listened to with intense interest by everyone present, including myself. Indeed, so spell-bound was his audience that one could have heard a pin drop; and the breathless silence continued for some seconds after he had ceased speaking. Then, in the midst of the stillness, I heard the door creak softly behind me.

There was nothing particularly significant in the sound.

But its effects were amazing. Glancing at the inspector, who faced the door, I saw his eyes open and his jaw drop until his face was a very mask of astonishment. And as this expression was reflected on the faces of the jurymen, the coroner and everyone present, excepting Thorndyke, whose back was towards the door, I turned to see what had happened. And then I was as astonished as the others.

The door had been pushed open a few inches and a head thrust in—a negro's head, covered with a soiled and blood-stained rag forming a rough bandage. As I gazed at the black, shiny, inquisitive face, the man pushed the door farther open and shuffled into the room; and instantly there arose on all sides a soft rustle and an inarticulate murmur followed by breathless silence, while every eye was riveted on the man's left leg.

It certainly was a strange, repulsive-looking member, its monstrous bulk exposed to view through the slit trouser and its great shapeless foot—shoeless, since no shoe could have contained it—rough and horny like the foot of an elephant. But it was tragic and pitiable, too; for the man, apart from this horrible excrescence, was a fine, big, athletic-looking fellow.

The coroner was the first to recover. Addressing Thorndyke, but keeping an eye on the negro, he said:

"Your evidence, then, amounts to this: On the night of Joseph Riggs's death, there was a stranger in the house That stranger was a negro, who seems to have wounded his head and who, you say, had a swelled left leg."

"Yes," Thorndyke admitted, "that is the substance of my evidence."

Once more a hush fell on the room. The negro stood near the door, rolling his eyes to and fro over the assembly as if uneasily conscious that everyone was looking at him. Suddenly, he shuffled up to the foot of the table and addressed the coroner in deep, buzzing, resonant tones.

"You tink I kill dat ole man! I no kill um. He kill himself. I look um."

Having made this statement, he rolled his eyes defiantly

round the court, and then turned his face expectantly towards the coroner, who said:

"You say you know that Mr. Riggs killed himself?"

"Yas. I look um. He shoot himself. You tink I shoot um. I tell you I no shoot um. Why, I fit kill this man? I no sabby um."

"Then," said the coroner, "if you know that he killed himself, you must tell us all that you know; and you must swear to tell us the truth."

"Yas," the negro agreed, "I tell you eberyting one time. I tell you de troof. Dat ole man kill himself."

When the coroner had explained to him that he was not bound to make any statement that would incriminate him, as he still elected to give evidence, he was sworn and proceeded to make his statement with curious fluency and self-possession.

"My name Robert Bruce. Dat my English name. My country name Kwaku Mensah. I live for Winnebah on de Gold Coast. Dis time I cook's mate for dat steamer *Leckie*. On Wednesday night I lay in my bunk. I no fit sleep. My leg he chook me. I look out of de porthole. Plenty moon live. In my country when de moon big, peoples walk about. So I get up. I go ashore to walk about de town. Den de rain come. Plenty rain. Rain no good for my sickness. So I try for open house doors. No fit. All doors locked. Den I come to dis ole man's house. I turn de handle. De door open. I go in. I look in one room. All dark. Nobody live. Den I look annudder room. De door open a little. Light live inside. I no like dat. I think, spose somebody come out and see me, he tink I come for teef someting. So I tink I go away.

"Den something make 'Ping!' same like gun. I hear someting fall down in dat room. I go to de door and I sing out, 'Who live in dere?' Nobody say nutting. So I open de door and look in. De room full ob smoke. I look dat ole man on de floor. I look dat pistol. I sabby dat ole man kill himself. Den I frighten too much. I run out. De place all dark. Someting knock my head. He make blood come plenty. I go back for ship. I no say nutting to no-

body. Dis day I hear peoples talk 'bout dis inquess to find out who kill dat ole man. So I come to hear what peoples say. I hear dat gentleman say I kill dat ole man. So I tell you eberyting. I tell you de troof. Finish."

"Do you know what time it was when you came ashore?" the coroner asked.

"Yas. When I come down de ladder I hear eight bells ring. I get back to de ship jus' before dey ring two bells in the middle watch."

"Then you came ashore at midnight and got back just before one o'clock?"

"Yas. Dat is what I say."

A few more questions put by the coroner having elicited nothing fresh, the case was put briefly to the jury.

"You have heard the evidence, gentlemen, and most remarkable evidence it was. Like myself, you must have been deeply impressed by the amazing skill with which Dr. Thorndyke reconstructed the personality of the unknown visitor to that house, and even indicated correctly the very time of the visit, from an examination of a mere chance blood-stain. As to the statement of Kwaku Mensah, I can only say that I see no reason to doubt its truth. You will note that it is in complete agreement with Dr. Thorndyke's evidence, and it presents no inconsistencies or improbabilities. Possibly the police may wish to make some further inquiries, but for our purposes it is the evidence of an eye-witness, and as such must be given full weight. With these remarks, I leave you to consider your verdict."

The jury took but a minute or two to deliberate. Indeed, only one verdict was possible if the evidence was to be accepted, and that was agreed on unanimously—suicide whilst temporarily insane. As soon as it was announced, the inspector, formally and with congratulations, released Fletcher from custody, and presently retired in company with the negro to make a few inquiries on board the ship.

The rising of the court was the signal for a wild demonstration of enthusiasm and gratitude to Thorndyke. To play his part efficiently in that scene he would have needed to be furnished, like certain repulsive Indian deities, with

an unlimited outfit of arms. For everyone wanted to shake his hand, and two of them—Mr. Foxley and Miss Markham—did so with such pertinacity as entirely to exclude the other candidates.

"I can never thank you enough," Miss Markham exclaimed, with swimming eyes, "if I should live to be a hundred. But I shall think of you with gratitude every day of my life. Whenever I look at Robert, I shall remember that his liberty, and even his life, are your gifts."

Here she was so overcome by grateful emotion that she again seized and pressed his hand. I think she was within an ace of kissing him; but being, perhaps, doubtful how he would take it, compromised by kissing Robert instead. And, no doubt, it was just as well.

R. AUSTIN FREEMAN

THE BLUE SEQUIN

THORNDYKE stood looking up and down the platform with anxiety that increased as the time drew near for the departure of the train.

"This is very unfortunate," he said, reluctantly stepping into an empty smoking compartment as the guard executed a flourish with his green flag. "I am afraid we have missed our friend." He closed the door, and, as the train began to move, thrust his head out of the window.

"Now I wonder if that will be he," he continued. "If so, he has caught the train by the skin of his teeth, and is now in one of the rear compartments."

The subject of Thorndyke's speculations was Mr. Edward Stopford, of the firm of Stopford and Myers, of Portugal Street, solicitors, and his connection with us at present arose out of a telegram that had reached our chambers on the preceding evening. It was reply-paid, and ran thus:

"Can you come here to-morrow to direct defence? Important case. All costs undertaken by us.—STOPFORD AND MYERS."

Thorndyke's reply had been in the affirmative, and early on this present morning a further telegram—evidently posted overnight—had been delivered:

"Shall leave for Woldhurst by 8.25 from Charing Cross. Will call for you if possible.—EDWARD STOPFORD."

(From "John Thorndyke's Cases," by R. Austin Freeman. By permission of the author and of the publishers, Hodder & Stoughton, Ltd., London.)

He had not called, however, and, since he was unknown personally to us both, we could not judge whether or not he had been among the passengers on the platform.

"It is most unfortunate," Thorndyke repeated, "for it deprives us of that preliminary consideration of the case which is so invaluable." He filled his pipe thoughtfully, and, having made a fruitless inspection of the platform at London Bridge, took up the paper that he had bought at the bookstall, and began to turn over the leaves, running his eye quickly down the columns, unmindful of the journalistic baits in paragraph or article.

"It is a great disadvantage," he observed, while still glancing through the paper, "to come plump into an inquiry without preparation—to be confronted with the details before one has a chance of considering the case in general terms. For instance——"

He paused, leaving the sentence unfinished, and as I looked up inquiringly I saw that he had turned over another page, and was now reading attentively.

"This looks like our case, Jervis," he said presently, handing me the paper and indicating a paragraph at the top of the page. It was quite brief, and was headed "Terrible Murder in Kent," the account being as follows:

"A shocking crime was discovered yesterday morning at the little town of Woldhurst, which lies on the branch line from Halbury Junction. The discovery was made by a porter who was inspecting the carriages of the train which had just come in. On opening the door of a first-class compartment, he was horrified to find the body of a fashionably-dressed woman stretched upon the floor. Medical aid was immediately summoned, and on the arrival of the divisional surgeon, Dr. Morton, it was ascertained that the woman had not been dead more than a few minutes.

"The state of the corpse leaves no doubt that a murder of a most brutal kind has been perpetrated, the cause of death being a penetrating wound of the head, inflicted with some pointed implement, which must have been used with terrible violence, since it has perforated the skull and entered the brain. That robbery was not the motive of the

crime is made clear by the fact that an expensively fitted dressing-bag was found on the rack, and that the dead woman's jewellery, including several valuable diamond rings, was untouched. It is rumoured that an arrest has been made by the local police."

"A gruesome affair," I remarked, as I handed back the paper, "but the report does not give us much information."

"It does not," Thorndyke agreed, "and yet it gives us something to consider. Here is a perforating wound of the skull, inflicted with some pointed implement—that is, assuming that it is not a bullet wound. Now, what kind of implement would be capable of inflicting such an injury? How would such an implement be used in the confined space of a railway-carriage, and what sort of person would be in possession of such an implement? These are preliminary questions that are worth considering, and I commend them to you, together with the further problems of the possible motive—excluding robbery—and any circumstances other than murder which might account for the injury."

"The choice of suitable implements is not very great," I observed.

"It is very limited, and most of them, such as a plasterer's pick or a geological hammer, are associated with certain definite occupations. You have a notebook?"

I had, and, accepting the hint, I produced it and pursued my further reflections in silence, while my companion, with his notebook also on his knee, gazed steadily out of the window. And thus he remained, wrapped in thought, jotting down an entry now and again in his book, until the train slowed down at Halbury Junction, where we had to change on to a branch line.

As we stepped out, I noticed a well-dressed man hurrying up the platform from the rear and eagerly scanning the faces of the few passengers who had alighted. Soon he espied us, and, approaching quickly, asked, as he looked from one of us to the other:

"Dr. Thorndyke?"

"Yes," replied my colleague, adding: "And you, I presume, are Mr. Edward Stopford?"

The solicitor bowed. "This is a dreadful affair," he said, in an agitated manner. "I see you have the paper. A most shocking affair. I am immensely relieved to find you here. Nearly missed the train, and feared I should miss you."

"There appears to have been an arrest," Thorndyke began.

"Yes—my brother. Terrible business. Let us walk up the platform; our train won't start for a quarter of an hour yet."

We deposited our joint Gladstone and Thorndyke's travelling-case in an empty first-class compartment, and then, with the solicitor between us, strolled up to the unfrequented end of the platform.

"My brother's position," said Mr. Stopford, "fills me with dismay—but let me give you the facts in order, and you shall judge for yourself. This poor creature who has been murdered so brutally was a Miss Edith Grant. She was formerly an artist's model, and as such was a good deal employed by my brother, who is a painter—Harold Stopford, you know, A.R.A. now——"

"I know his work very well, and charming work it is"

"I think so, too. Well, in those days he was quite a youngster—about twenty—and he became very intimate with Miss Grant, in quite an innocent way, though not very discreet; but she was a nice respectable girl, as most English models are, and no one thought any harm. However, a good many letters passed between them, and some little presents, amongst which was a beaded chain carrying a locket, and in this he was fool enough to put his portrait and the inscription, 'Edith, from Harold.'

"Later on Miss Grant, who had a rather good voice, went on the stage, in the comic opera line, and, in consequence, her habits and associates changed somewhat; and, as Harold had meanwhile become engaged, he was naturally anxious to get his letters back, and especially to exchange the locket for some less compromising gift. The letters she

eventually sent him, but refused absolutely to part with the locket.

"Now, for the last month Harold has been staying at Halbury, making sketching excursions into the surrounding country, and yesterday morning he took the train to Shinglehurst, the third station from here, and the one before Woldhurst.

"On the platform here he met Miss Grant, who had come down from London, and was going on to Worthing. They entered the branch train together, having a first-class compartment to themselves. It seems she was wearing his locket at the time, and he made another appeal to her to make an exchange, which she refused, as before. The discussion appears to have become rather heated and angry on both sides, for the guard and a porter at Munsden both noticed that they seemed to be quarrelling; but the upshot of the affair was that the lady snapped the chain, and tossed it together with the locket to my brother, and they parted quite amiably at Shinglehurst, where Harold got out. He was then carrying his full sketching kit, including a large holland umbrella, the lower joint of which is an ash staff fitted with a powerful steel spike for driving into the ground.

"It was about half-past ten when he got out at Shinglehurst; by eleven he had reached his pitch and got to work, and he painted steadily for three hours. Then he packed up his traps, and was just starting on his way back to the station, when he was met by the police and arrested.

"And now, observe the accumulation of circumstantial evidence against him. He was the last person seen in company with the murdered woman—for no one seems to have seen her after they left Munsden; he appeared to be quarrelling with her when she was last seen alive, he had a reason for possibly wishing for her death, he was provided with an implement—a spiked staff—capable of inflicting the injury which caused her death, and, when he was searched, there was found in his possession the locket and broken chain, apparently removed from her person with violence.

"Against all this is, of course, his known character—he is the gentlest and most amiable of men—and his subsequent conduct—imbecile to the last degree if he had been guilty; but, as a lawyer, I can't help seeing that appearances are almost hopelessly against him."

"We won't say 'hopelessly,' " replied Thorndyke, as we took our places in the carriage, "though I expect the police are pretty cocksure. When does the inquest open?"

"To-day at four. I have obtained an order from the coroner for you to examine the body and be present at the *post-mortem*."

"Do you happen to know the exact position of the wound?"

"Yes; it is a little above and behind the left ear—a horrible round hole, with a ragged cut or tear running from it to the side of the forehead."

"And how was the body lying?"

"Right along the floor, with the feet close to the off-side door."

"Was the wound on the head the only one?"

"No; there was a long cut or bruise on the right cheek —a contused wound the police surgeon called it, which he believes to have been inflicted with a heavy and rather blunt weapon. I have not heard of any other wounds or bruises."

"Did anyone enter the train yesterday at Shinglehurst?" Thorndyke asked.

"No one entered the train after it left Halbury."

Thorndyke considered these statements in silence, and presently fell into a brown study, from which he roused only as the train moved out of Shinglehurst station.

"It would be about here that the murder was committed," said Mr. Stopford; "at least, between here and Woldhurst."

Thorndyke nodded rather abstractedly, being engaged at the moment in observing with great attention the objects that were visible from the windows.

"I notice," he remarked presently, "a number of chips scattered about between the rails, and some of the chair-

wedges look new. Have there been any platelayers at work lately?"

"Yes," answered Stopford, "they are on the line now, I believe—at least, I saw a gang working near Woldhurst yesterday, and they are said to have set a rick on fire; I saw it smoking when I came down."

"Indeed; and this middle line of rails is, I suppose, a sort of siding?"

"Yes; they shunt the goods trains and empty trucks on to it. There are the remains of the rick—still smouldering, you see."

Thorndyke gazed absently at the blackened heap until an empty cattle-truck on the middle track hid it from view. This was succeeded by a line of goods-waggons, and these by a passenger coach, one compartment of which—a first-class—was closed up and sealed. The train now began to slow down rather suddenly, and a couple of minutes later we brought up in Woldhurst station.

It was evident that rumours of Thorndyke's advent had preceded us, for the entire staff—two porters, an inspector, and the station-master—were waiting expectantly on the platform, and the latter came forward, regardless of his dignity, to help us with our luggage.

"Do you think I could see the carriage?" Thorndike asked the solicitor.

"Not the inside, sir," said the station-master, on being appealed to. "The police have sealed it up. You would have to ask the inspector."

"Well, I can have a look at the outside, I suppose?" said Thorndyke, and to this the station-master readily agreed, and offered to accompany us.

"What other first-class passengers were there?" Thorndyke asked.

"None, sir. There was only one first-class coach, and the deceased was the only person in it. It has given us all a dreadful turn, this affair has," he continued, as we set off up the line. "I was on the platform when the train came in. We were watching a rick that was burning up the line, and a rare blaze it made, too; and I was just saying that

we should have to move the cattle-truck that was on the mid-track, because, you see, sir, the smoke and sparks were blowing across, and I thought it would frighten the poor beasts. And Mr. Felton he don't like his beasts handled roughly. He says it spoils the meat."

"No doubt he is right," said Thorndyke. "But now, tell me, do you think it is possible for any person to board or leave the train on the off-side unobserved? Could a man, for instance, enter a compartment on the off-side at one station and drop off as the train was slowing down at the next, without being seen?"

"I doubt it," replied the station-master. "Still, I wouldn't say it is impossible."

"Thank you. Oh, and there's another question. You have a gang of men at work on the line, I see. Now, do those men belong to the district?"

"No, sir; they are strangers, every one, and pretty rough diamonds some of 'em are. But I shouldn't say there was any real harm in 'em. If you was suspecting any of 'em of being mixed up in this——"

"I am not," interrupted Thorndyke rather shortly. "I suspect nobody; but I wish to get all the facts of the case at the outset."

"Naturally, sir," replied the abashed official; and we pursued our way in silence.

"Do you remember, by the way," said Thorndyke, as we approached the empty coach, "whether the off-side door of the compartment was closed and locked when the body was discovered?"

"It was closed, sir, but not locked. Why, sir, did you think——?"

"Nothing, nothing. The sealed compartment is the one, of course?"

Without waiting for a reply, he commenced his survey of the coach, while I gently restrained our two companions from shadowing him, as they were disposed to do. The off-side footboard occupied his attention specially, and when he had scrutinized minutely the part opposite the fatal compartment, he walked slowly from end to end with

his eyes but a few inches from its surface, as though he was searching for something.

Near what had been the rear end he stopped, and drew from his pocket a piece of paper; then, with a moistened finger-tip he picked up from the footboard some evidently minute object, which he carefully transferred to the paper, folding the latter and placing it in his pocket-book.

He next mounted the footboard, and, having peered in through the window of the sealed compartment, produced from his pocket a small insufflator or powder-blower with which he blew a stream of impalpable smoke-like powder on to the edges of the middle window, bestowing the closest attention on the irregular dusty patches in which it settled, and even measuring one on the jamb of the window with a pocket-rule. At length he stepped down, and, having carefully looked over the near-side footboard, announced that he had finished for the present.

As we were returning down the line, we passed a workingman, who seemed to be viewing the chairs and sleepers with more than casual interest.

"That, I suppose, is one of the plate-layers?" Thorndyke suggested to the station-master.

"Yes, the foreman of the gang," was the reply.

"I'll just step back and have a word with him, if you will walk on slowly." And my colleague turned back briskly and overtook the man, with whom he remained in conversation for some minutes.

"I think I see the police inspector on the platform," remarked Thorndyke, as we approached the station.

"Yes, there he is," said our guide. "Come down to see what you are after, sir, I expect." Which was doubtless the case, although the officer professed to be there by the merest chance.

"You would like to see the weapon, sir, I suppose?" he remarked, when he had introduced himself.

"The umbrella-spike," Thorndyke corrected. "Yes, if I may. We are going to the mortuary now."

"Then you'll pass the station on the way; so, if you care to look in, I will walk up with you."

This proposition being agreed to, we all proceeded to the police-station, including the station-master, who was on the very tiptoe of curiosity.

"There you are, sir," said the inspector, unlocking his office, and ushering us in. "Don't say we haven't given every facility to the defence. There are all the effects of the accused, including the very weapon the deed was done with."

"Come, come," protested Thorndyke; "we mustn't be premature." He took the stout ash staff from the officer, and, having examined the formidable spike through a lens, drew from his pocket a steel calliper-gauge, with which he carefully measured the diameter of the spike, and the staff to which it was fixed. "And now," he said, when he had made a note of the measurements in his book, "we will look at the colour-box and the sketch. Ha! a very orderly man, your brother, Mr. Stopford. Tubes all in their places, palette-knives wiped clean, palette cleaned off and rubbed bright, brushes wiped—they ought to be washed before they stiffen—all this is very significant." He unstrapped the sketch from the blank canvas to which it was pinned, and, standing it on a chair in a good light, stepped back to look at it.

"And you tell me that that is only three hours' work!" he exclaimed, looking at the lawyer. "It is really a marvellous achievement."

"My brother is a very rapid worker," replied Stopford dejectedly.

"Yes, but this is not only amazingly rapid; it is in his very happiest vein—full of spirit and feeling. But we mustn't stay to look at it longer." He replaced the canvas on its pins, and having glanced at the locket and some other articles that lay in a drawer, thanked the inspector for his courtesy and withdrew.

"That sketch and the colour-box appear very suggestive to me," he remarked, as we walked up the street.

"To me also," said Stopford gloomily, "for they are under lock and key, like their owner, poor old fellow."

He sighed heavily, and we walked on in silence.

The mortuary-keeper had evidently heard of our arrival, for he was waiting at the door with the key in his hand, and, on being shown the coroner's order, unlocked the door, and we entered together; but, after a momentary glance at the ghostly, shrouded figure lying upon the slate table, Stopford turned pale and retreated, saying that he would wait for us outside with the mortuary-keeper.

As soon as the door was closed and locked on the inside, Thorndyke glanced curiously round the bare, white-washed building. A stream of sunlight poured in through the skylight, and fell upon the silent form that lay so still under its covering sheet, and one stray beam glanced into a corner by the door, where, on a row of pegs and a deal table, the dead woman's clothing was displayed.

"There is something unspeakably sad in these poor relics, Jervis," said Thorndyke, as we stood before them. "To me they are more tragic, more full of pathetic suggestion, than the corpse itself. See the smart, jaunty hat, and the costly skirts hanging there, so desolate and forlorn; the dainty *lingerie* on the table, neatly folded—by the mortuary-man's wife, I hope—the little French shoes and open-work silk stockings. How pathetically eloquent they are of harmless, womanly vanity, and the gay, careless life, snapped short in the twinkling of an eye. But we must not give way to sentiment. There is another life threatened, and it is in our keeping."

He lifted the hat from its peg, and turned it over in his hand. It was, I think, what is called a "picture-hat"—a huge, flat, shapeless mass of gauze and ribbon and feather, spangled over freely with dark-blue sequins. In one part of the brim was a ragged hole, and from this the glittering sequins dropped off in little showers when the hat was moved.

"This will have been worn tilted over on the left side," said Thorndyke, "judging by the general shape and the position of the hole."

"Yes," I agreed. "Like that of the Duchess of Devonshire in Gainsborough's portrait."

"Exactly."

He shook a few of the sequins into the palm of his hand, and, replacing the hat on its peg, dropped the little discs into an envelope, on which he wrote, "From the hat," and slipped it into his pocket. Then, stepping over to the table, he drew back the sheet reverently and even tenderly from the dead woman's face, and looked down at it with grave pity. It was a comely face, white as marble, serene and peaceful in expression, with half-closed eyes, and framed with a mass of brassy, yellow hair; but its beauty was marred by a long linear wound, half cut, half bruise, running down the right cheek from the eye to the chin.

"A handsome girl," Thorndyke commented—"a dark-haired blonde. What a sin to have disfigured herself so with that horrible peroxide." He smoothed the hair back from her forehead, and added: "She seems to have applied the stuff last about ten days ago. There is about a quarter of an inch of dark hair at the roots. What do you make of that wound on the cheek?"

"It looks as if she had struck some sharp angle in falling, though, as the seats are padded in first-class carriages, I don't see what she could have struck."

"No. And now let us look at the other wound. Will you note down the description?" He handed me his notebook, and I wrote down as he dictated: "A clean-punched circular hole in skull, an inch behind and above margin of left ear—diameter, an inch and seven-sixteenths; starred fracture of parietal bone; membranes perforated, and brain entered deeply; ragged scalp-wound, extending forward to margin of left orbit; fragments of gauze and sequins in edges of wound. That will do for the present. Dr. Morton will give us further details if we want them."

He pocketed his calipers and rule, drew from the bruised scalp one or two loose hairs, which he placed in the envelope with the sequins, and, having looked over the body for other wounds or bruises (of which there were none), replaced the sheet, and prepared to depart.

As we walked away from the mortuary, Thorndyke was silent and deeply thoughtful, and I gathered that he was piecing together the facts that he had acquired. At length Mr. Stopford, who had several times looked at him curiously, said:

"The *post-mortem* will take place at three, and it is now only half-past eleven. What would you like to do next?"

Thorndyke, who, in spite of his mental preoccupation, had been looking about him in his usual keen, attentive way, halted suddenly.

"Your reference to the *post-mortem*," said he, "reminds me that I forgot to put the ox-gall into my case."

"Ox-gall!" I exclaimed, endeavoring vainly to connect this substance with the technique of the pathologist. "What were you going to do with——"

But here I broke off, remembering my friend's dislike of any discussion of his methods before strangers.

"I suppose," he continued, "there would hardly be an artist's colourman in a place of this size?"

"I should think not," said Stopford. "But couldn't you get the stuff from a butcher? There's a shop just across the road."

"So there is," agreed Thorndyke, who had already observed the shop. "The gall ought, of course, to be prepared, but we can filter it ourselves—that is, if the butcher has any. We will try him, at any rate."

He crossed the road towards the shop, over which the name "Felton" appeared in gilt lettering, and, addressing himself to the proprietor, who stood at the door, introduced himself and explained his wants.

"Ox-gall?" said the butcher. "No, sir, I haven't any just now; but I am having a beast killed this afternoon, and I can let you have some then. In fact," he added, after a pause, "as the matter is of importance, I can have one killed at once if you wish it."

"That is very kind of you," said Thorndyke, "and it would greatly oblige me. Is the beast perfectly healthy?"

"They're in splendid condition, sir. I picked them out

of the herd myself. But you shall see them—ay, and choose the one that you'd like killed."

"You are really very good," said Thorndyke warmly. "I will just run into the chemist's next door, and get a suitable bottle, and then I will avail myself of your exceedingly kind offer."

He hurried into the chemist's shop, from which he presently emerged, carrying a white paper parcel; and we then followed the butcher down a narrow lane by the side of his shop. It led to an enclosure containing a small pen, in which were confined three handsome steers, whose glossy, black coats contrasted in a very striking manner with their long, greyish-white, nearly straight horns.

"These are certainly very fine beasts, Mr. Felton," said Thorndyke, as we drew up beside the pen, "and in excellent condition, too."

He leaned over the pen and examined the beasts critically, especially as to their eyes and horns; then, approaching the nearest one, he raised his stick and bestowed a smart tap on the under-side of the right horn, following it by a similar tap on the left one, a proceeding that the beast viewed with stolid surprise.

"The state of the horns," explained Thorndyke, as he moved on to the next steer, "enables one to judge, to some extent, of the beast's health."

"Lord bless you, sir," laughed Mr. Felton, "they haven't got no feeling in their horns, else what good 'ud their horns be to 'em?"

Apparently he was right, for the second steer was as indifferent to a sounding rap on either horn as the first. Nevertheless, when Thorndyke approached the third steer, I unconsciously drew nearer to watch; and I noticed that, as the stick struck the horn, the beast drew back in evident alarm, and that when the blow was repeated, it became manifestly uneasy.

"He don't seem to like that," said the butcher. "Seems as if—— Hullo, that's queer!"

Thorndyke had just brought his stick up against the left horn, and immediately the beast had winced and

started back, shaking his head and moaning. There was not, however, room for him to back out of reach, and Thorndyke, by leaning into the pen, was able to inspect the sensitive horn, which he did with the closest attention, while the butcher looked on with obvious perturbation.

"You don't think there's anything wrong with this beast, sir, I hope," said he.

"I can't say without a further examination," replied Thorndyke. "It may be the horn only that is affected. If you will have it sawn off close to the head, and sent up to me at the hotel, I will look at it and tell you. And, by way of preventing any mistakes, I will mark it and cover it up, to protect it from injury in the slaughter-house."

He opened his parcel and produced from it a wide-mouthed bottle labelled "Ox-gall," a sheet of gutta-percha tissue, a roller bandage, and a stick of sealing-wax. Handing the bottle to Mr. Felton, he encased the distal half of the horn in a covering by means of the tissue and the bandage, which he fixed securely with the sealing-wax.

"I'll saw the horn off and bring it up to the hotel myself, with the ox-gall," said Mr. Felton. "You shall have them in half an hour."

He was as good as his word, for in half an hour Thorndyke was seated at a small table by the window of our private sitting-room in the Black Bull Hotel. The table was covered with newspaper, and on it lay the long grey horn and Thorndyke's travelling-case, now open and displaying a small microscope and its accessories. The butcher was seated solidly in an armchair waiting, with a half-suspicious eye on Thorndyke, for the report; and I was endeavouring by cheerful talk to keep Mr. Stopford from sinking into utter despondency, though I, too, kept a furtive watch on my colleague's rather mysterious proceedings.

I saw him unwind the bandage and apply the horn to his ear, bending it slightly to and fro. I watched him, as

he scanned the surface closely through a lens, and observed him as he scraped some substance from the pointed end on to a glass slide, and, having applied a drop of some reagent, began to tease out the scraping with a pair of mounted needles. Presently he placed the slide under the microscope, and, having observed it attentively for a minute or two, turned round sharply.

"Come and look at this, Jervis," said he.

I wanted no second bidding, being on tenterhooks of curiosity, but came over and applied my eye to the instrument.

"Well, what is it?" he asked.

"A multipolar nerve corpuscle—very shrivelled, but unmistakable."

"And this?"

He moved the slide to a fresh spot.

"Two pyramidal nerve corpuscles and some portions of fibres."

"And what do you say the tissue is?"

"Cortical brain substance, I should say, without a doubt."

"I entirely agree with you. And that being so," he added, turning to Mr. Stopford, "we may say that the case for the defence is practically complete."

"What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?" exclaimed Stopford, starting up.

"I mean that we can now prove when and where and how Miss Grant met her death. Come and sit down here, and I will explain. No, you needn't go away, Mr. Felton We shall have to subpœna you. Perhaps," he continued, "we had better go over the facts and see what they suggest. And first we note the position of the body, lying with the feet close to the off-side door, showing that, when she fell, the deceased was sitting, or more probably standing, close to that door. Next there is this." He drew from his pocket a folded paper, which he opened, displaying a tiny blue disc. "It is one of the sequins with which her hat was trimmed, and I have in this envelope several more which I took from the hat itself.

"This single sequin I picked up on the rear end of the off-side footboard, and its presence there makes it nearly certain that at some time Miss Grant had put her head out of the window on that side.

"The next item of evidence I obtained by dusting the margins of the off-side window with a light powder, which made visible a greasy impression three and a quarter inches long on the sharp corner of the right-hand jamb (right-hand from the inside, I mean).

"And now as to the evidence furnished by the body. The wound in the skull is behind and above the left ear, is roughly circular, and measures one inch and seven sixteenths at most, and a ragged scalp-wound runs from it towards the left eye. On the right cheek is a linear contused wound three and a quarter inches long. There are no other injuries.

"Our next facts are furnished by this." He took up the horn and tapped it with his finger, while the solicitor and Mr. Felton stared at him in speechless wonder. "You notice it is a left horn, and you remember that it was highly sensitive. If you put your ear to it while I strain it, you will hear the grating of a fracture in the bony core. Now look at the pointed end, and you will see several deep scratches running lengthwise, and where those scratches end the diameter of the horn is, as you see by this calliper-gauge, one inch and seven-sixteenths. Covering the scratches is a dry blood-stain, and at the extreme tip is a small mass of a dried substance which Dr. Jervis and I have examined with the microscope and are satisfied is brain tissue."

"Good God!" exclaimed Stopford eagerly. "Do you mean to say——"

"Let us finish with the facts, Mr. Stopford," Thorndyke interrupted. "Now, if you look closely at that blood-stain, you will see a short piece of hair stuck to the horn, and through this lens you can make out the root-bulb. It is a golden hair, you notice, but near the root it is black, and our calliper-gauge shows us that the black portion is fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long. Now, in this en-

velope are some hairs that I removed from the dead woman's head. They also are golden hairs, black at the roots, and when I measure the black portion I find it to be fourteen sixty-fourths of an inch long. Then, finally, there is this."

He turned the horn over, and pointed to a small patch of dried blood. Embedded in it was a blue sequin.

Mr. Stopford and the butcher both gazed at the horn in silent amazement; then the former drew a deep breath and looked up at Thorndyke.

"No doubt," said he, "you can explain this mystery, but for my part I am utterly bewildered, though you are filling me with hope."

"And yet the matter is quite simple," returned Thorndyke, "even with these few facts before us, which are only a selection from the body of evidence in our possession. But I will state my theory, and you shall judge." He rapidly sketched a rough plan on a sheet of paper, and continued: "These were the conditions when the train was approaching Woldhurst: Here was the passenger-coach, here was the burning rick, and here was a cattle-truck. This steer was in that truck. Now my hypothesis is that at that time Miss Grant was standing with her head out of the offside window, watching the burning rick. Her wide hat, worn on the left side, hid from her view the cattle-truck which she was approaching, and then this is what happened." He sketched another plan to a larger scale. "One of the steers—this one—had thrust its long horn out through the bars. The point of that horn struck the deceased's head, driving her face violently against the corner of the window, and then, in disengaging, ploughed its way through the scalp, and suffered a fracture of its core from the violence of the wrench. This hypothesis is inherently probable, it fits all the facts, and those facts admit of no other explanation."

The solicitor sat for a moment as though dazed, then he rose impulsively and seized Thorndyke's hands.

"I don't know what to say to you," he exclaimed husk-

ily, "except that you have saved my brother's life, and for that may God reward you!"

The butcher rose from his chair with a slow grin.

"It seems to me," said he, "as if that ox-gall was what you might call a blind, eh, sir?"

And Thorndyke smiled an inscrutable smile.

When we returned to town on the following day we were a party of four, which included Mr. Harold Stopford. The verdict of "Death by misadventure," promptly returned by the coroner's jury, had been shortly followed by his release from custody, and he now sat with his brother and me, listening with rapt attention to Thorndyke's analysis of the case.

"So, you see," the latter concluded, "I had six possible theories of the cause of death worked out before I reached Halbury, and it only remained to select the one that fitted the facts. And when I had seen the cattle-truck, had picked up that sequin, had heard the description of the steers, and had seen the hat and the wounds, there was nothing left to do but the filling in of details."

"And you never doubted my innocence?" asked Harold Stopford.

Thorndyke smiled at his quondam client.

"Not after I had seen your colour-box and your sketch," said he, "to say nothing of the spike."

THOMAS W. HANSHEW

THE DIVIDED HOUSE

"SUPERINTENDENT NARKOM waitin' upstairs in your room, sir. Come unexpected and sudden like about five minutes ago," said Dollops, as the key was withdrawn from the lock and Cleek stepped into the house. "Told him you'd jist run round the corner, sir, to get a fresh supply of them cigarettes you're so partial to, so he sat down and waited. And, oh, I say, guv'ner?"

"Yes?" said Cleek inquiringly, stopping in his two-steps-at-a-time ascent of the stairs.

"Letter come for you, too, sir, whilst you was out. Envelope addressed in a lady's hand to 'Captain Burbage.' Took it up and laid it on your table, sir."

"All right," said Cleek, and resumed his journey up the stairs, passing a moment later into his private room and the presence of Maverick Narkom.

The superintendent, who was standing by the window looking out into the brilliant radiance of the morning, immediately set his back to the things that had nothing to do with the conduct of Scotland Yard, and advanced toward his famous ally with that eagerness and enthusiasm which he reserved for matters connected with crime and the law.

"Good morning, Cleek, such a case; you'll fairly revel in it," he began excitedly. "As I didn't expect to find you out at this hour of the morning, I dispensed with the formality of 'phoning, hopped into the car, and came on at once. Dollops said you'd be back in half a minute, and," looking at his watch, "it's now ten since I arrived."

(From "Cleek, The Master Detective," by Thomas W. Hanshew. Copyright, 1918, by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, and by Cassell & Co., Ltd., London, England.)

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Narkom," broke in Cleek, "but——" He chopped off the sentence suddenly, for his eye had fallen upon the letter of which Dollops had spoken. It was lying face upward upon the table, so that he could see the clear, fine, characterful hand in which it was written and could read clearly the Devonshire postmark.

"Cleek," went on Narkom, accepting the invitation to be seated, but noticing nothing in his eagerness to get to business, "never have I brought you any case which is so likely to make your fortune as this, and when I tell you that the reward offered runs well into five figures——"

"A moment, please!" interjected Cleek agitatedly. "I must read this letter before I give attention to anything else, no matter how important!"

Then, not waiting for Narkom to signify his consent to the interruption, as perforce he was obliged to do in the circumstances, he carried the letter over to the window, broke the seal, and read it eagerly.

Even if he had not recognized her handwriting, he would have known from the postmark that it was from Ailsa Lorne, for he had no correspondent in Devonshire, no correspondent but Narkom anywhere, for the matter of that. His lonely life, the need for secrecy, his plan of self-effacement, prevented that. But he had known for months that Miss Lorne was in Devon, that she had gone there as governess in the family of Sir Jasper Drood, when her determination not to leave England had compelled her to resign her position as guide and preceptress to little Lord Chepstow on the occasion of his mother's wedding with Captain Hawksley. And now she was writing to him! He set his back to Narkom and read these words:

The Priory, Tuesday, June 10th.

DEAR FRIEND:

If you remember, as I so often do, that last day in London, when you put off the demands of your duty to see me safely in the train and on my way to this new home, you will perhaps also remember something that you

said to me at parting. You told me that if a time ever came when I should need your friendship or your help, I had but to ask for them. If that is true, and I feel sure that it is, dear Mr. Cleek, I need them now. Not for myself, however, but for one who has proved a kind friend indeed since my coming here, and who, through me, asks your kind aid in solving a deep and distressing mystery and saving a threatened human life. No reward can be offered, I fear, beyond that which comes of the knowledge of having done a good and generous act, Mr. Cleek, for my friend is not in a position to offer one. But I seem to feel that this will weigh little with you, and it emboldens me to make this appeal. So, if no other case prevents, and you really wish to do me a favour, if you can make it convenient to be in the neighbourhood of the lych-gate of Lyntonhurst Church on Wednesday morning at eleven o'clock, you will win the everlasting gratitude of—

Your sincere friend,

AILSA LORNE.

The superintendent heard the unmistakable sound of the letter being folded and slid back into its envelope, and very properly concluded that the time of grace had expired.

"Now, Cleek, let us get down to business," he began forthwith. "This amazing case which I wish you to undertake and will, as I have already said, bring you a colossal reward——"

"Your pardon, Mr. Narkom," interjected Cleek, screwing round on his heel and beginning to search for a railway guide among the litter of papers and pamphlets jammed into the spaces of a revolving bookcase, "your pardon, but I can undertake no case, sir—at least, for the present. I am called to Devonshire, and must start at once. What's that? No, there is nothing to be won, not a farthing piece. It's a matter of friendship, nothing more."

"But, Cleek! God bless my soul, man, this is madness!

You are simply chucking away enough money to keep you for the next three years."

"It wouldn't make any difference if it were enough to keep me for the next twenty, Mr. Narkom. You can't buy entrance to paradise for all the money in the world, my friend, and I'm getting a day in it for nothing! Now then," flirting over the leaves of the guide book, "let's see how the trains run. Dorset—Darsham—Dalby—Devonshire. Good! Here you are. Um-m-m. Too late for that. Can't possibly catch that one, either. Ah, here's the one—1.56—that will do." Then he closed the book, almost ran to the door, and, leaning over the banister, shouted down the staircase, "Dollops—Dollops, you snail, where are you? Dol—— Oh, there you are at last, eh? Pack my portmanteau. Best clothes, best boots, best everything I've got, and look sharp about it. I'm off to Devonshire by the 1.56."

And, do all that he might, Narkom could not persuade him to alter his determination. The 1.56 he said he would take; the 1.56 he did take; and night coming down over the peaceful paths and the leafy loveliness of Devon found him putting up at the inn of "The Three Desires," hours and hours and hours ahead of the appointed time, to make sure of being at the trysting place at eleven next morning.

He was. On the very tick of the minute he was there at the old moss-grown lych-gate, and there Miss Lorne found him when she drove up in Lady Drood's pony phaeton a little time afterward. She was not alone, however. She had spoken of a friend, and a sharp twitch disturbed Cleek's heart when he saw that a young man sat beside her, a handsome young man of two- or three-and-twenty, with a fair moustache, a pair of straight-looking blue eyes, and that squareness of shoulder and uprightness of bearing which tells the tale of a soldier.

In another moment she had alighted, her fingers were lying in the close grasp of Cleek's, and the colour was coming and going in rosy gusts over her smiling countenance.

"How good of you to come!" she said. "But, there! I knew that you would, if it were within the range of possibility; I said so to Mr. Bridewell as we came along. Mr. Cleek, let me have the pleasure of making you acquainted with Lieutenant Bridewell. His fiancée, Miss Warrington, is the dear friend of whom I wrote you. Lieutenant Bridewell is home on leave after three years' service in India, Mr. Cleek; but in those three years strange and horrible things have happened, are still happening, in his family circle. But now that you have come—— We shall get at the bottom of the mystery now, Lieutenant; I feel certain that we shall. Mr. Cleek will find it out, be sure of that."

"At least, I will endeavour to do so, Mr. Bridewell," said Cleek himself, as he wrung the young man's hand and decided that he liked him a great deal better than he had thought he was going to do. "What is the difficulty? Miss Lorne's letter mentioned the fact that not only was there a mystery to be probed but a human life in danger. Whose life, may I ask? Yours?"

"No," he made reply, with a sort of groan. "I wish to heaven it were no more than that. I'd soon clear out from the danger zone and put an end to the trouble, get rid of that lot at the house and put miles of sea between them and me, I can tell you. It's my dad they are killing —my dear old dad, bless his heart—and killing him in the most mysterious and subtle manner imaginable. I don't know how, I don't know why, that's the mystery of it, for he hasn't any money nor any expectations, just the annuity he bought when he got too old to follow his calling (he used to be a sea captain, Mr. Cleek), and there'd be no sense in getting rid of him for that, because, of course, the annuity dies with him. But somebody's got some kind of a motive and somebody's doing it, that's certain, for when I went out to India three years ago he was a hale and hearty old chap, fit as a fiddle and lively as a cricket, and now, when I come back on leave, I find him a broken wreck, a peevish, wasted old man, hardly able to help himself, and afflicted with some horrible

incurable disease which seems to be eating him up alive."

"Eating him?" repeated Cleek. "What do you mean by 'eating' him, Mr. Bridewell? The expression is peculiar."

"Well, it exactly explains the circumstances, Mr. Cleek. If I didn't know better, I should think it a case of leprosy. But it isn't. I've seen cases of leprosy, and this isn't one of them. There's none of the peculiar odour, for one thing; and, for another, it isn't contagious. You can touch the spots without suffering doing so, although *he* suffers, dear old boy, and suffers horribly. It's just living decay, Mr. Cleek—just that. Fordyce, that's the doctor who's attending him, you know, says that the only way he has found to check the thing is by amputation. Already the dear old chap has lost three fingers from the right hand by that means. Fordyce says that the hand itself will have to go in time if they can't check the thing, and then, if that doesn't stop it, the arm will have to go."

Cleek puckered up his brows and began to rub his thumb and forefinger up and down his chin.

"Fordyce seems to have a pronounced penchant for amputation, Mr. Bridewell," he said after a moment. "Competent surgeon, do you think?"

"Who—Fordyce? Lord bless you, yes! One of the 'big pots' in that line. Harley Street specialist in his day. Fell heir to a ton of money, I believe, and gave up practice because it was too wearing. Couldn't get over the love of it, however, so set up a ripping little place down here, went in for scientific work, honour and glory of the profession and all that sort of thing, you know. God knows what would have become of the dad if he hadn't taken up the case! might be in his grave by this time. Fordyce has been a real friend, Mr. Cleek; I can't be grateful enough to him for the good he has done: taking the dear old dad into his home, so to speak, him and Aunt Ruth and—and that pair, the Cordovas."

"The Cordovas? Who are they? Friends or relatives?"

"Neither, I'm afraid. To tell the truth. they're the

people I suspect, though God knows why I should, and God forgive me if I'm wrong. They're two West Indians, brother and sister, Mr. Cleek. Their father was mate of the *Henrietta,* under my dad, years and years ago. Mutinied, too, the beggar, and was shot down, as he ought to have been, as *any* mutineer ought to be. Left the two children, mere kiddies at the time. Dad took 'em in, and has been keeping them and doing for them ever since. I don't like them—never did like them. Fordyce doesn't like them, either. Colonel Goshen does, however. He's sweet on the girl, I fancy."

Cleek's eyebrows twitched upward suddenly, his eyes flashed a sharp glance at the lieutenant, and then dropped again.

"Colonel Goshen, eh?" he said quietly. "Related, by any chance, to that 'Colonel Goshen' who testified on behalf of the claimant in the great Tackbun case?"

"Don't know, I'm sure. Never heard of the case, Mr. Cleek."

"Didn't you? It was quite a sensation some eighteen months ago. But you were in India, then, of course. Fellow turned up who claimed to be the long-lost Sir Aubrey Tackbun who ran away to sea when a boy some thirty odd years ago and was lost track of entirely. Lost his case at that first trial, and got sent to prison for conspiracy. Is out again now. Claims to have new and irrefutable evidence, and is going to have a second try for the title and estates. A Colonel Goshen, of the Australian militia, was one of his strongest witnesses. Wonder if there is any connection between the two?"

"Shouldn't think so. This Colonel Goshen's an American or he says he is, and I've no reason to doubt him. Deuced nice fellow, whatever he is, and has been a jolly good friend to the pater. As a matter of fact, it was through him that Fordyce got to know the dad and became interested in his case, and—— What's that? Lud, no! No possible means of connecting my old dad with any lost heirs, sir—not a ghost of one. Born here in Devon, married here, lived all his life here, that is, whenever he

was on land, and he'll die here, and die soon, too, if you don't get at the bottom of this and save him. And you will, Mr. Cleek, and you will, won't you? Miss Lorne says that you've solved deeper mysteries than this, and that you will get at the bottom of it without fail."

"Miss Lorne has more faith in my ability than most people, I fear, Mr. Bridewell. I will try to live up to it, however. But suppose you give me the facts of the case a little more clearly. When and how did it all begin?"

"I think it was about eight months ago that Aunt Ruth wrote me about it," the lieutenant replied. "Aunt Ruth is my late mother's maiden sister, Mr. Cleek. My mother died at my birth, and Aunt Ruth brought me up. As I told you, my father retired from the sea some years ago, and, having purchased an annuity, lived on that. He managed to scrape enough together to have me schooled properly and put through Sandhurst, and when I got my lieutenancy, and was subsequently appointed to a commission in India, I left him living in the little old cottage where I was born. With him were Aunt Ruth and Paul and Lucretia Cordova. Up to about eight months or so ago he continued to live there, devoting himself to his little garden and enjoying life on land as much as a man who loves the sea ever can do. Then, of a sudden, Lucretia Cordova fell in with Colonel Goshen, and introduced him to the pater. A few days after that my father seems to have eaten something which disagreed with him, for he was suddenly seized with all the symptoms of ptomaine poisoning. He rallied, however, but from that point a strange weakness overcame him, and at the colonel's suggestion he went for a sail round the coast with him. He did not improve. The weakness seemed to grow, but without any sign of the horrible bodily suffering with which he is now afflicted.

"Colonel Goshen is a great friend of Dr. Fordyce's, and through that friendship managed to interest him in the case to such a degree that he made a twenty-mile trip especially to see my father. They struck up a great friendship. Fordyce was certain, he said, that he could

cure the dad if he had him within daily reach, and, on the dad saying that he couldn't afford to come over to this part of the country and keep up two establishments, Fordyce came to the rescue, like the jolly brick he is. In other words, his place here being a good deal larger than he requires, he's a bachelor, Mr. Cleek, he put up a sort of partition to separate it into two establishments, so to speak, put one-half at the dad's disposal rent free, and there he is housed now, and Aunt Ruth and the two Cordovas with him. Yes, and even me, now; for as soon as he heard that I was coming home on leave, Fordyce wouldn't listen to my going to 'The Three Desires' for digs, but insisted that I, too, should be taken in, and a clinking suite of rooms in the west wing put at my disposal.

"But in spite of all his hopes for the dear old dad's eventual cure, things in that direction have grown steadily worse. The horrible malady which is now consuming him manifested itself about a fortnight after his arrival, and it has been growing steadily worse every day. But it isn't natural, Mr. Cleek; I know what I am saying, and I say that! Somebody is doing something to him for some diabolical reason of which I know nothing, and he is dying —dying by inches. Not by poison, I am sure of that, for since the hour of my return I have not let him eat or drink a single thing without myself partaking of it before it goes to him and eating more of it after it has gone to him. But there is no effect in my case. Nothing does he touch with his hand that I do not touch after him; but the disease never attacks me, yet all the while he grows worse and worse, and the end keeps creeping on. There! that's the case, Mr. Cleek. For God's sake, get at the bottom of it and save my father, if you can."

Cleek did not reply for a moment. Putting out his hands suddenly, he began to drum a thoughtful tattoo upon the post of the lych-gate, his eyes fixed on the ground and a deep ridge between his puckered brows. But, of a sudden:

"Tell me something," he said. "These Cordovas—what reason have you for suspecting them?"

"None, only that I dislike them. They're half-castes, for one thing, and—well, you can't trust a half-caste at any time."

"Hum-m-m! Nothing more than that, eh? Just a natural dislike? And your Aunt Ruth; what of her?"

"Oh, just the regulation prim old maid: sour as a lemon and as useful. A good sort, though. Fond of the pater, careful as a mother of him, temper like a file, and a heart a good deal bigger than you'd believe at first blush. Do anything in the world for me, bless her."

"Even to the point of putting up a friend of yours for a couple of days?"

"Yes; if I had one in these parts, which I haven't."

"Never count your chickens—you know the rest," said Cleek, with a smile. "A fellow you met out in India, a fellow named George Headland, lieutenant, remember the name, please, has just turned up in these parts. You met him quite unexpectedly, and if you want to get at the bottom of this case, take him along with you and get your Aunt Ruth to put him up for a day or two."

"Oh, Mr. Cleek!"

"George Headland, if you please, Miss Lorne. There's a great deal in a name, Shakespeare or anybody else to the contrary."

It was two o'clock in the afternoon when, after lunching with Cleek at the inn of "The Three Desires," Lieutenant Bridewell turned up at the divided house with his friend, "George Headland," and introduced him to the various occupants thereof; and, forthwith, "Mr. George Headland" proceeded to make himself as agreeable to all parties as he knew how to do. He found Aunt Ruth the very duplicate of what young Bridewell had prepared him to find, namely, a veritable Dorcas: the very embodiment of thrift, energy, punctiliousness, with the graceful figure of a ramrod and the martial step of a grenadier; and he decided forthwith that, be she a monument of all the virtues, she was still just the kind of

woman he would fly to the ends of the earth rather than have to live with for one short week. In brief, he did not like Miss Ruth Sutcliff, and Miss Ruth Sutcliff did not like him.

Of the two Cordovas, he found the girl Lucretia a mere walking vanity bag: idle, shiftless, eager for compliments, and without two ideas in her vain little head. "Whoever is at the bottom of the affair, she isn't," was his mental comment. "She is just a gadfly, just a gaudy, useless insect, born without a sting, or the spirit to use one if she had it."

Her brother Paul was not much better. "A mere lizard, content to bask in the sunshine and caring not who pays for the privilege so long as he gets it. I can see plainly enough why a fellow like young Bridewell should dislike the pair of them, and even distrust and suspect them, too; but, unless I am woefully mistaken, they can be counted out of the case entirely. Who, then, is in it? Or is there really any case at all? Is the old captain's malady a natural one, in spite of all these suspicions? I'll know that when I see him."

When he *did* see him, about an hour after his arrival at the divided house, he did know it, and decided forthwith, whatever the mysterious cause, foul play was there beyond the question of a doubt. Somebody had a secret reason for destroying this old man's life, and that somebody was quietly and craftily doing it? But how? By what means? Not by poison, that was certain, for no poison could have this purely local effect and confine itself to the right side of the body, the right hand, the right arm, the right shoulder, spread to no other part and simply corrode the flesh and destroy the bone there as lime or caustic might, and leave the left side wholly unblemished, entirely without attack. Wholly unlike the case of old Mr. Bawdrey, in the affair of the "Nine-fingered Skeleton," this could be no poison that was administered by touch, injected into the blood through the pores of the skin; for whatsoever Captain Bridewell touched, his son touched after him, and no evil came of it to him. Then,

too, there was no temptation of wealth to inherit, as in old Bawdrey's case, for the little that Captain Bridewell possessed would die with him. He had no expectations; he stood in no one's way to an inheritance. Why, then, was he being done to death?—and how?

A dear, kindly, lovable old fellow, with a heart as big as an ox's, a hand ever ready to help those in need, as witness his adoption of the mutineering mate's children, a mind as free from guile as any child's, he ought, in the natural order of things, to have not one enemy in the world, one acquaintance who did not wish him well; and yet——

"I must manage to get a look at that maimed hand somehow and to examine that peculiar eruption closely," said Cleek to Bridewell, when they were alone together. "I could get so little impression of its character on account of the bandages and the sling. Do you think I could get to see it some time without either?"

"Yes, certainly you can. Fordyce always dresses it in the evening. We'll make it our business to be about then, and he'll be sure to let you see it if you like."

"I should, indeed," said Cleek. "And by the way, I haven't seen Dr. Fordyce yet. Isn't he about?"

"Not just at present; be in to tea, though. He's off on his rounds at present. Makes a practice of looking after the poor for the simple humanity of the thing. Never charges for his services. You'll like Fordyce, he's a ripping sort."

And so indeed he seemed to be when, at tea, Cleek met him for the first time and found him a jovial, round-faced, apple-cheeked, rollicking little man of fifty-odd years.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Headland—very pleased indeed," he said gaily, when young Bridewell introduced them. "Londoner, I can see, by the cut of you, Londoner and soldier, too. No mistaking military training when a man carries himself like that. Londoner myself once upon a time. But no place like the country for health, and no part of the country like Devon. Paradise,

sir, Paradise. Well, Captain, and how are we to-day, eh? Better?"

"No, I'm afraid not, Doctor," replied the old seaman. "Pain's been a little worse than yesterday. Never was so bad as when I woke up this morning; and, if you'll pardon my saying it, sir, that lotion you gave me doesn't seem to have done a bit of good."

"Oho! there's a lotion, is there?" commented Cleek mentally, when he heard this. "I'll have a look at that lotion before I go to bed to-night." Yet, when he did, he found it a harmless thing that ought to have been beneficial even if it had not.

"I say, Fordyce," put in young Bridewell, remembering Cleek's desire and seeing a chance of gratifying it sooner than he had anticipated, "don't you think it would be a good thing to have a look at the pater's arm now? He says the pain's getting up to the shoulder, and so bad at times he can hardly bear it. Do look at it, will you? I hate to see him suffering like this."

"Oh, certainly, of course I will. Just wait until I've had my tea, old chap," replied the doctor; and, when he had had it, moved over to the deep chair where the captain sat rocking to and fro and squeezing his lips together in silent agony, and proceeded to remove the bandages. He had barely uncovered the maimed hand, however, ere Cleek sauntered over in company with the old seaman's son and stood beside him. He was close enough now to study the character of the eruption, and the sight of it tightened the creases about his lips, twitched one swift gleam of light through the darkness of his former bewilderment.

"Good God!" he said, swept out of himself for the moment by the appalling realization which surged over him; then, remembering himself, caught the doctor's swiftly given upward look and returned it with one of innocent blankness. "Awful, isn't it, Doctor? Don't think it's smallpox, or something of that sort, do you?"

"Rubbish!" responded the doctor, with laughing contempt for such a silly fool as this. "Smallpox, indeed!

Man alive, it isn't the least thing like it. I should think a child would know that. No, Captain, there isn't any change in its condition, despite the increased pain, unless it may be that it is just a shade better than when I dressed it this morning. There, there, don't worry about its going up to the shoulder, Lieutenant. We'll save the arm, never fear." And then, without examining that arm at all, proceeded to rebandage the maimed hand and replace it in the supporting sling; and, afterward, went over and talked with Aunt Ruth before passing out and going round to his side of the divided house. But so long as he remained in sight, Cleek's narrowed eyes followed him and the tense creases seamed Cleek's indrawn, silent lips. But when he broke that silence it was to speak to the captain and to say some silly, pointless thing about that refuge of the witless—the weather.

"Bridewell," he said ten minutes later, when, upon Aunt Ruth's objecting to it being done indoors, the lieutenant invited him to come outside for a smoke, "Bridewell, tell me something: Where does your father sleep?"

"Dad? Oh, upstairs in the big front room just above us. Why?"

"Nothing, but I've a whim to see the place, and without anybody's knowledge. Can you take me there?"

"Certainly. Come along," replied the lieutenant, and led the way round to a back staircase and up that to the room in question. It was a pretty room, hung with an artistic pink paper which covered not only the original walls but the wooden partitions which blocked up the door leading to Dr. Fordyce's own part of the house; and close against that partition and so placed that the screening canopy shut out the glare from the big bay window, stood a narrow brass bedstead equipped with the finest of springs, the very acme of luxury and ease in the way of soft mattresses, and so piled with down pillows that a king might have envied it for a resting-place.

Cleek looked at it for a moment in silence, then reached out and laid his hand upon the papered partition.

"What's on the other side of this?" he queried. "Does it lead into a passage or a room?"

"Into Fordyce's laboratory," replied the lieutenant. "As a matter of fact, this used to be Fordyce's own bedroom, the best in the house. But he gave it up especially for the dad's use as the view and the air are better than in any other room in the place, he says, and he's a great believer in that sort of thing for sick people. Ripping of him, wasn't it?"

"Very. Suppose you could get your father not to sleep here to-night for a change?"

"Wouldn't like to try. He fairly dotes on that comfortable soft bed. There's not another to compare with it in the house. I'm sure he wouldn't rest half so well on a harder one, and wouldn't give this one up unless he was compelled to do so by some unforeseen accident."

"Good," said Cleek. "Then there is going to be 'some unforeseen accident'—look!" With that he stripped down the counterpane, lifted the water-jug from the washstand and emptied its contents over the mattress, and when the pool of water had been absorbed, replaced the covering and arranged the bed as before.

"Great Scot, man," began the lieutenant, amazed by this; but Cleek's hand closed sharply on his arm, and Cleek's whispered "Sh-h-h!" sounded close to his ear. "Keep your father up after everybody else has gone to bed, especially Aunt Ruth," he went on. "If she's not at hand, the damage can't be repaired for this night at least. Give him your room and you come in with me. Bridewell, I know the man; I know the means; and with God's help to-night I'll know the reason as well!"

Everything was carried out in accordance with Cleek's plan. The captain, trapped into talking by his son, sat up long after Miss Sutcliff and the one serving maid the house boasted had gone to bed, and when, in time, he, too, retired to his room, the soaked mattress did its work in the most effectual manner. Whimpering like a hurt child over the unexplained and apparently unexplainable accident, the old man suffered his son to lead him off

to his own room; and there, unable to rest on the harder mattress, and suffering agonies of pain, he lay for a long time before the door swung open, the glimmer of a bedroom candle tempered the darkness to a sort of golden dusk, and the very double of Dr. Fordyce came softly into the room. It was Cleek, wrapped in a well-padded dressing-gown and carrying in addition to the candle a bottle of lotion and a fresh linen bandage.

"Why, Doctor," began the old captain, half rising upon the elbow of his uninjured arm. "Whatever in the world brings you here?"

"Study, my dear old friend, study," returned a voice so like to Dr. Fordyce's own that there was scarcely a shade of difference. "I have been sitting up for hours and hours thinking, reading, studying until now I am sure, very, very sure, Captain, that I have found a lotion that will ease the pain. For a moment after I let myself in by the partition door and found your room empty I didn't know where to turn; but fortunately your moans guided me in the right direction, and here I am. Now then, let us off with that other bandage and on with this new one, and I think we shall soon ease up that constant pain."

"God knows I hope so, Doctor, for it is almost unbearable," the old man replied, and sat holding his lips tightly shut to keep from crying out while Cleek undid the bandage and stripped bare the injured arm from finger-tips to shoulder. His gorge rose as he saw the thing, and in seeing, knew for certain now that what he had suspected in that first glance was indeed the truth, and in that moment there was something akin to murder in his soul. He saw with satisfaction, however, that, although the upper part of the arm was much swollen, as yet the progress of decay had not gone much beyond the wrist; and having seen this and verified the nature of the complaint, he applied the fresh lotion and was for bandaging the arm up and stealing out and away again when he caught sight of something that made him suck in his breath and set his heart hammering.

The captain, attracted by his movement and the sound of his thick breathing, opened his pain-closed eyes, looked round and met the questioning look of his.

"Oh," he said with a smile of understanding. "You are looking at the tattooing near my shoulder, are you? Haven't you ever noticed it before?"

"No," said Cleek, keeping his voice steady by an effort. "Who did it and why? There's a name there and a queer sort of emblem. They are not yours, surely?"

"Good heaven, no! My name's Samuel Bridewell and always has been. Red Hamish put that thing there—oh, more than five-and-twenty years ago. Him and me was wrecked on a reef in the Indian Ocean when the *Belle Burgoyne* went down from under us and took all but us down with her. It might as well have took Red Hamish, too, poor chap, for he was hurt cruel bad, and he only lived a couple of days afterward. There was just me alone on the reef when the *Kitty Gordon* come sailin' along, see my signal of distress, and took me off near done for after eight days' fastin' and thirstin' on that bare scrap of terry firmer as they calls it. I'd have been as dead as Red Hamish himself, I reckon, in another twenty-four hours."

"Red Hamish? Good heavens, who was Red Hamish?"

"Never heard him called any other name than just that. Must have had one, of course; and it's so blessed long ago now I disremember what it was he put on the back of my shoulder. A great hand at tattooing he was. Fair lived with his injy ink and his prickin' needles. Kept 'em in a belt he wore and had 'em on him when the *Belle Burgoyne* went down and I managed to drag him on to the reef, poor chap.

"'Had your call, Red,' I says to him when I got him up beside me. 'I reckon you're struck for death, old man.' 'I know it,' says he to me. 'But better me than you, cap'n,' he says, ''cause there ain't nobody waitin' and watchin' for me to come home to her and the kid. Though there is one woman who'd like to know where I'd gone and when and how death found me,' he says, after a

moment. 'I'd like to send a word—a message—a sign just to her, cap'n. She'd know—she'd understand and—well, it's only right that she should.'

"'Well, give it to me, Red,' I says. 'I'll take it to her if I live, old man.' But, bless you, there wasn't anything to write the message on, of course; and it wasn't for a long time that Red hit upon a plan.

"'Cap'n,' he says, 'I've got my inks and my needles. Let me put it on your shoulder, will you? Just a name and a sign. But she'll understand, she'll know, and that's all I want.' Of course I agreed—who wouldn't for a mate at a time like that? So I lays down on my face and Red goes at me with the needles and works till he gets it done.

"'There,' he says when he'd reached the end of it. 'If ever anybody wants to know who died on this here reef, cap'n, there's Red Hamish's answer,' he says. 'She'll know, my mother, the only one that cares,' says he, and chucks his belt into the sea and that's all.

"Thanky, Doctor, thanky. It does feel better, and I do believe that I shall sleep now. At first I missed the hummin' of that electric fan in your laboratory, I fancy, but bless you, sir, I feel quite drowsy and comfortable now. Remember me to Colonel Goshen when you go back to your rooms, will you? I see him go round the angle of the buildin' and into your side of the house just after you left me to-night, sir, and I thought likely he'd come round and call, but he didn't. Good-night, sir—good-night, and many thanks!"

But even before he had finished speaking Cleek had gone out of the room, and was padding swiftly along the passage to where Lieutenant Bridewell awaited him.

"Well?" exclaimed the young man breathlessly as the fleet-moving figure flashed in and began tearing off the beard, the dressing-gown, and the disguising wig. "You found out? You learned something, then?"

"I have learned everything, everything!" said Cleek, and pouncing upon his portmanteau whisked out a couple of pairs of handcuffs. "Don't stop to ask questions now.

Come with me to the partition door and clap those things on the wrists of the man that gets by me. There are two of them in there, your Dr. Fordyce and your Colonel Goshen, and I want them both."

"Good heavens, man, you don't surely mean that they, those two dear friends——"

"Don't ask questions, come!" rapped in Cleek, then whirled out of the room and flew down the passage to the partition door, and pounded heavily upon it. "Doctor Fordyce, Doctor Fordyce, open the door, come quickly. Something has happened to Captain Bridewell," he called. "He's not in his room, not in the house, and it looks as if somebody had spirited him away!"

A clatter of footsteps on the other side of the partition door answered this; then the bolt flashed back, the door whirled open, two figures—one on the very heels of the other—came tumbling into sight, and then there was mischief!

Cleek sprang and a click of steel sounded. The doctor, caught in a sort of throttle-hold, went down with him upon the floor; the colonel, unable to check himself in time, sprawled headlong over them, and by the time he could pull himself to his knees young Bridewell was upon him, and there were gyves upon his wrists as well as upon the doctor's.

"Got you, you pretty pair!" said Cleek, as he rose to his feet and shut a tight hand upon the collar of the manacled doctor; "got you, you dogs, and your little game is up. Oh, you needn't bluster, Doctor; you needn't come the outraged innocence, Colonel. You'll, neither of you, bolster up the rascally claim of your worthy confederate, the Tackbun Claimant; and your game with the X-rays, your devil's trick of rotting away a man's arm to destroy tattooed evidence of a rank impostor's guilt is just so much time wasted and just so many pounds sterling thrown away."

"What's that?" blustered the colonel. "What do you mean? What are you talking about? Tackbun Claimant? Who's the Tackbun Claimant? Do you realize to whom

you are speaking? Fordyce, who and what is this infernally impudent puppy?"

"Gently, gently, Colonel. Name's Cleek, if you are anxious to know it."

"Cleek? Cleek?"

"Precisely, Doctor. Cleek of Scotland Yard, Cleek of the Forty Faces, if you want complete details. And if there are more that you feel you would like to know, I'll give them to you when I hand you over to the Devonshire police for your part in this rascally conspiracy to cheat the late Lady Tackbun's nephew out of his lawful rights and to rot off the arm of the man who constitutes the living document which will clearly establish them. The lost Sir Aubrey Tackbun is dead, my friend, dead as Julius Cæsar, dead beyond the hopes of you and your confederates to revive even the ghost of him now. He died on a coral reef in the Indian Ocean five-and-twenty years ago, and the proof of it will last as long as Captain Bridewell can keep his arm and lift his voice to tell his story, and I think that will be a good many years, now that your little scheme is exploded. You'll make no X-ray martyr of that dear old man, so the money you spent in the instrument on the other side of that board partition, the thing whose buzzing you made him believe came from an electric fan, represents just so many sovereigns thrown away!"

"Yes, it was a crafty plot, a scheme very well laid indeed," said Cleek, when he went next day to the lychgate to say good-bye again to Ailsa Lorne. "Undoubtedly a mild poison was used in the beginning, as an excuse, you know, for the 'colonel' to get him away and into the charge of the 'doctor,' and, once there, the rest was easy if subtle. The huge X-ray machine would play always upon the partition whilst the captain was sleeping, and you know how efficacious that would be when there was only a thin board between that powerful influence and the object to be operated upon. Then, too, the head of the bed was so arranged that the captain's right side

would always be exposed to the influence, so there was no possibility of evading it.

"How did I suspect it? Well, to tell you the truth, I never did suspect it until I saw the captain's hand. Then I recognized the marks. I saw the hand of a doctor, an X-ray martyr, who sacrificed himself to science last year, Miss Lorne, and the marks were identical. Oh, well, I've solved the riddle, Miss Lorne, that's the main point, and now—now I must emulate 'Poor Joe' and move on again."

"And without any reward, without asking any, without expecting any. How good of you—how generous!"

He stood a moment, twisting his heel into the turf and breathing heavily. Then, quite suddenly:

"Perhaps I did want one," he said, looking into her eyes. "Perhaps I want one still. Perhaps I always hoped that I should get it, and that it would come from you!"

A rush of sudden colour reddened all her face. She let her eyes fall, and said nothing. But what of that? After all, actions speak louder than utterances, and Cleek could see that there was a smile upon her lips. He stretched forth his hand and laid it gently on her arm.

"Miss Lorne," he said very softly, "if, some day when all the wrongs I did in those other times, are righted, and all the atonement a man can make on this earth has been made, if then—in that time—I come to you and ask for that reward, do you think—ah! do you think that you can find it in your heart to give it?"

She lifted up her eyes, the eyes that had saved him, that had lit the way back, that would light it ever to the end of life and, stretching out her hand, put it into his.

"When that day dawns, come and see," she said, and smiled at him through happy tears.

THOMAS W. HANSHEW

THE RIDDLE OF THE RAINBOW PEARL

"Note for you, sir, messenger just fetched it. Addressed to 'Captain Burbage,' so it'll be from the Yard," said Dollops, coming into the room with a doughnut in one hand and a square envelope in the other.

Cleek, who had been sitting at his writing-table with a litter of folded documents, bits of antique jewellery, and what looked like odds and ends of faded ribbon lying before him, swept the whole collection into the table drawer as Dollops spoke and stretched forth his hand for the letter.

It was one of Narkom's characteristic communications, albeit somewhat shorter than those communications usually were, a fact which told Cleek at once that the matter was one of immense importance. It ran:

My Dear Cleek:

For the love of goodness don't let anything tempt you into going out to-night. I shall call about ten. Foreign government affair—reward simply enormous. Watch out for me.

Yours, in hot haste.

Maverick Narkom.

"Be on the look-out for the red limousine," said Cleek, glancing over at Dollops, who stood waiting for orders. "It will be along at ten. That's all. You may go."

"Right you are, guv'ner. I'll keep my eyes peeled, sir. I do hope it's something to do with a restaurant or a

(From "Cleek, The Master Detective," by Thomas W. Hanshew. Copyright, 1918, by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, and by Cassell & Co., Ltd., London, England.)

cookshop this time. I could do with a job of that sort, my word, yes! I'm fair famishin'. And, beggin' pardon, but you don't look none too healthy yourself this evening, guv'ner."

"I? What nonsense! I'm as fit as a fiddle. Toddle along, and look out for Mr. Narkom's arrival. It's after nine already, so he'll soon be here."

"Anybody a-comin' with him, sir?"

"I don't know, he didn't say. Cut along now; I'm busy!" said Cleek. Nevertheless, when Dollops had gone and the door was shut and he had the room to himself again, and, if he really did have any business on hand, there was no reason in the world why he should not have set about it, he remained sitting at the table and idly drumming upon it with his finger-tips, a deep ridge between his brows and a far-away expression in his fixed, unwinking eyes. And so he was still sitting when, something like twenty minutes later, the sharp honk of a motor horn sounded.

Narkom's note lay on the table close to his elbow. He took it up, crumpled it into a ball, and threw it into his waste basket. "A foreign government affair," he said with a curious one-sided smile. "A strange coincidence, to be sure!" Then, as if obeying an impulse, he opened the drawer, looked at the litter of things he had swept into it, shut it up again, and locked it securely, putting the key into his pocket and rising to his feet. Two minutes later, when Narkom pushed open the door and entered the room, he found Cleek leaning against the edge of the mantel-piece and smoking a cigarette with the air of one who hadn't a thought beyond the affairs of the moment, nor a care for anything but the flavour of Egyptian tobacco.

"Ah, my dear fellow, you can't think what a relief it is to catch you. I had but a moment in which to dash off the note, and I was on thorns with fear that it would miss you," said the superintendent as he bustled in and shook hands with him.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Mr. Narkom, I came

within an ace of doing the very thing you speak of," replied Cleek. "It's full moon, for one thing, and it's primrose time for another. Happily for your desire to catch me, however, I—er—got interested in the evening paper and that delayed me."

"Very glad, dear chap; very glad indeed," began Narkom. Then, as his eye fell upon the particular evening paper in question lying on the writing-table, a little crumpled from use, but with a certain "displayed-headed" article of three columns' length in full view, he turned round and stared at Cleek with an air of awe and mystification. "My dear fellow, you must be under the guardianship of some uncanny familiar. You surely must, Cleek!" he went on. "Do you mean to tell me that is what kept you at home? That you have been reading about the preparations for the forthcoming coronation of King Ulric of Mauravania?"

"Yes; why not? I am sure it makes interesting reading, Mr. Narkom. The kingdom of Mauravania has had sufficient ups and downs to inspire a novelist, so its records should certainly interest a mere reader. To be frank, I found the account of the amazing preparations for the coronation of his new Majesty distinctly entertaining. They are an excitable and spectacular people, those Mauravanians, and this time they seem bent upon outdoing themselves."

"But, my dear Cleek, that you should have chosen to stop at home and read about that particular affair! It's uncanny! Positively uncanny, Cleek!"

"My dear Mr. Narkom, I don't see where the uncanny element comes in, I must confess," replied Cleek with an indulgent smile. "Surely an Englishman must always feel a certain amount of interest in Mauravanian affairs. Have the goodness to remember that there should be an Englishman upon that particular throne. Aye, and there would be, too, but for one of those moments of weak-backed policy, of a desire upon the part of the 'old-woman' element which sometimes prevails in English politics to keep friendly relations with other powers at any cost.

"Brush up your history, Mr. Narkom, and give your memory a fillip. Eight-and-thirty years ago Queen Karma of Mauravania had an English consort and bore him two daughters and one son. You will perhaps recall the mad rebellion, the idiotic rising which disgraced that reign. That was the time for England to have spoken. But the peace party had it by the throat; they, with their mawkish cry for peace, peace at any price, drowned the voices of men and heroes, and, the end was what it was! Queen Karma was deposed, she and her children fled, God knows how or where, and left a dead husband and father, slain like a hero and an Englishman, fighting for his own and with his face to the foe. Avenge his death? Nonsense! declared the old women. He had no right to defy the will of Heaven, no right to stir up strife with a friendly people and expect his countrymen to embroil themselves because of his lust for power. It would be a lasting disgrace to the nation if England allowed a lot of howling, blood-thirsty meddlers to persuade it to interfere!

"The old women had their way. Queen Karma and her children vanished; her uncle Duke Sforza came to the throne as Alburtus III., and eight months ago his son, the present King Ulric, succeeded him. The father had been a bad king, the son a bad crown prince. Mauravania has paid the price. Let her put up with it! I don't think in the light of these things, Mr. Narkom, there is any wonder that an Englishman finds interest in reading of the affairs of a country over which an Englishman's son might, and ought to, have ruled. As for me, I have no sympathy, my friend, with Mauravania or her justly punished people."

"Still, my dear fellow, that should not count when the reward for taking up this case is so enormous, and I dare say it will not."

"Reward? Case?" repeated Cleek. "What do you mean by that?"

"That I am here to enlist your services in the cause of King Ulric of Mauravania," replied Narkom impressively. "Something has happened, Cleek, which if not cleared up

before the coronation day, now only one month hence, as you must have read, will certainly result in his Majesty's public disgrace, and may result in his overthrow and death! His friend and chief adviser Count Irma has come all the way from Mauravania, and is at this moment downstairs in this house, to put the case in your hands and to implore you to help and to save his royal master!"

"His royal master? The son of the man who drove an Englishman's wife and an Englishman's children into exile—poverty—misery—despair?" said Cleek, pulling himself up. "I won't take it, Mr. Narkom! If he offers me millions, I'll lift no hand to help or to save Mauravania's king!"

The response to this came from an unexpected quarter.

"But to save Mauravania's queen, monsieur? Will you do nothing for her?" said an excited, an imploring voice. And as Cleek, startled by the interruption, switched round and glanced in the direction of the sound, the half-closed door swung inward and a figure, muffled to the very eyes, moved over the threshold into the room. "Have pardon, monsieur, I could not but overhear," went on the newcomer, turning to Narkom. "I should scarcely be worthy of his Majesty's confidence and favour had I remained inactive. I simply had to come up unbidden. *Had* to, monsieur"—turning to Cleek—"and so——" His words dropped off suddenly. A puzzled look first expanded and then contracted his eyes, and his lips tightened curiously under the screen of his white, military moustache. "Monsieur," he said, presently putting into words the sense of baffling familiarity which perplexed him. "Monsieur, you then are the great, the astonishing Cleek? You, monsieur? Pardon, but surely I have had the pleasure of meeting monsieur before? No, not here, for I have never been in England until to-day; but, in my own country, in Mauravania. Surely, monsieur, I have seen you there?"

"To the contrary," said Cleek, speaking the simple truth, "I have never set foot in Mauravania in all my life, sir. And as you have overheard my words you may

see that I do not intend to even now. The difficulties of Mauravania's king do not in the least appeal to me."

"Ah, but Mauravania's queen, monsieur, Mauravania's queen."

"The lady interests me no more than does her royal spouse."

"But, monsieur, she must if you are honest in what you say, and your sympathies are all with the deposed and exiled ones, the ex-Queen Karma and her children. Surely, monsieur, you who seem to know so well the history of that sad time cannot be ignorant of what has happened since to her ex-Majesty and her children?"

"I know only that Queen Karma died in France, in extreme poverty, befriended to the last by people of the very humblest birth and of not too much respectability. What became of her son I do not know; but her daughters, the two princesses, mere infants at the time, were sent, one to England, where she subsequently died, and the other to Persia, where, I believe, she remained up to her ninth year, and then went no one seems to know where."

"Then, monsieur, let me tell you what became of her. The late King Alburtus discovered her whereabouts, and, to prevent any possible trouble in the future, imprisoned her in the Fort of Sulberga up to the year before his death. Eleven months ago she became the Crown Prince Ulric's wife. She is now his consort. And by saving her, monsieur, you who feel so warmly upon the subject of the rights of her family's succession, will be saving her, helping Mauravania's queen, and defeating those who are her enemies."

Cleek sucked in his breath and regarded the man silently, steadily, for a long time. Then:

"Is that true, count?" he asked. "On your word of honour as a soldier and a gentleman, is that true?"

"As true as Holy Writ, monsieur. On my word of honour. On my hopes of heaven!"

"Very well, then," said Cleek quietly. "Tell me the case, count. I'll take it."

"Monsieur, my eternal gratitude. Also the reward is——"

"We will talk about that afterward. Sit down, please, and tell me what you want me to do."

"Oh, monsieur, almost the impossible," said the count despairfully. "The outwitting of a woman who must in very truth be the devil's own daughter, so subtle, so appalling are the craft and cunning of her. That, for one thing. For another, the finding of a paper which, if published, as the woman swears it shall be if her terms are not acceded to, will be the signal for his Majesty's overthrow. And, for the third"—emotion mastered him; his voice choked and failed; he deported himself for a moment like one afraid to let even his own ears hear the thing spoken of aloud, then governed his cowardice and went on—"For the third thing, monsieur," he said, lowering his tone until it was almost a whisper, "the recovery —the restoration to its place of honour before the coronation day arrives of that fateful gem, Mauravania's pride and glory, 'the Rainbow Pearl!' "

Cleek clamped his jaws together like a bloodhound snapping, and over his hardened face there came a slow-creeping, unnatural pallor.

"Has that been lost?" he said in a low, bleak voice. "Has he, this precious royal master of yours, this usurper —has he parted with that thing; the wondrous Rainbow Pearl?"

"Monsieur knows of the gem then?"

"Know of it? Who does not? Its fame is world-wide. Wars have been fought for it, lives sacrificed for it. It is more valuable than England's Koh-i-noor, and more important to the country and the crown that possess it. The legend runs, does it not? that Mauravania falls when the Rainbow Pearl passes into alien hands. An absurd belief, to be sure, but who can argue with a superstitious people or hammer wisdom into the minds of babies? And *that* has been lost, that gem so dear to Mauravania's people, so important to Mauravania's crown?"

"Yes, monsieur—ah, the good God help my country!

—yes!" said the count brokenly. "It has passed from his Majesty's hands; it is no longer among the crown jewels of Mauravania and a Russian has it."

"A Russian?" Cleek's cry was like to nothing so much as the snarl of a wild animal. "A Russian to hold it—and Russia the sworn enemy of Mauravania! God help your wretched king, Count Irma, if this were known to his subjects."

"Ah, monsieur, it is that we dread; it is that against which we struggle," replied the count. "If that jewel were missing on the coronation day, if it were known that a Russian holds it—Dear God! the populace would rise, monsieur, and tear his Majesty to pieces."

"He deserves no better!" said Cleek through his close-shut teeth. "To a Russian—a Russian! As heaven hears me, but for his queen—— Well, let it pass. Tell me how did this Russian get the jewel, and when?"

"Oh, long ago, monsieur, long ago; many months before King Alburtus died."

"Was it his hand that gave it up?"

"No, monsieur. He died without knowing of its loss, without suspecting that the stone in the royal palace is but a sham and an imitation," replied the count. "It all came of the youth, the recklessness, the folly of the crown prince. Monsieur may have heard of his—his many wild escapades, his thoughtless acts, his—his——"

"Call them dissipations, count, and give them their real name. His acts as crown prince were a scandal and a disgrace. To whom did he part with this gem, a woman?"

"Monsieur, yes! It was during the time he was stopping in Paris—incognito to all but a trusted few. He—he met the woman there, became fascinated with her, bound to her, an abject slave to her."

"A slave to a Russian? Mauravania's heir and a Russian?"

"Monsieur, he did not know that until afterward. In a mad freak—there was to be a masked ball—he yielded to the lady's persuasions to let her wear the famous

Rainbow Pearl for that one night. He journeyed back to Mauravania and abstracted it from among the royal jewels, putting a mere imitation in its place so that it should not be missed until he could return the original. Monsieur, he was never able to return it at any time, for once she got it, the Russian made away with it in some secret manner and refused to give it up. Her price for returning it was his royal father's consent to ennoble her, to receive her at the Mauravanian court, and so to alter the constitution that it would be possible for her to become the crown prince's wife."

"The proposition of an idiot. The thing could not possibly be done."

"No, monsieur, it could not. So the crown prince broke from her and bent all his energies upon the recovery of the pearl and the keeping of its loss a secret from the king and his people. Bravos, footpads, burglars, all manner of men, were employed before he left Paris. The woman's house was broken into, the woman herself waylaid and searched, but nothing came of it, no clue to the lost jewel could be found."

"Why, then, did he not appeal to the police?"

"Monsieur, he—he dared not. In one of his moments of madness he—she—that is—— Oh, monsieur, remember his youth! It appears that the woman had got him to put into writing something which, if made public, would cause the people of Mauravania to rise as one man and to do with him as wolves do with things that are thrown to them in their fury."

"The dog! Some treaty with a Russian, of course!" said Cleek indignantly. "Oh, fickle Mauravania, how well you are punished for your treasonable choice! Well, go on, count. What next?"

"Of a sudden, monsieur, the woman disappeared. Nothing was heard of her, no clue to her whereabouts discovered for two whole years. She was as one dead and gone until last week."

"Oho! She returned then?"

"Yes, monsieur. Without hint or warning she turned

up in Mauravania, accompanied by a disreputable one-eyed man who has the manner and appearance of one bred in the gutters of Paris, albeit he is well clothed, well looked after, and she treats him and his wretched collection of parakeets with the utmost consideration."

"Parakeets?" put in Narkom excitedly. "My dear Cleek, couldn't a parakeet be made to swallow a pearl?"

"Perhaps; but not this one, Mr. Narkom," he made reply. "It is quite the size of a pigeon's egg, I believe; is it not, count?"

"Yes, monsieur, quite. To see it is to remember it always. It has the changing lights of the rainbow and——"

"Never mind that; go on with the story, please. This woman and this one-eyed man appeared last week in Mauravania, you say?"

"Yes, monsieur; and with them a bodyguard of at least ten servants. Her demand now is that his Majesty make her his morganatic wife; that he establish her at the palace, under the same roof with his queen; and that she be allowed to ride with them in the state carriage on the coronation day. Failing that, she swears that she will not only publish the contents of that dreadful letter, but send the original to the chief of the Mauravanian police and appear in public at the coronation with the Rainbow Pearl upon her person."

"The Jezebel! What steps have you taken, count, to prevent this?"

"All that I can imagine, monsieur. To prevent her from getting into close touch with the public, I have thrown open my own house to her and received her and her retinue under my own roof rather than allow them to be quartered at an hotel. Also, this has given me the opportunity to have her effects and those of her followers secretly searched; but no clue to the letter, no clue to the pearl has anywhere been discovered."

"Still, she must have both with her, otherwise she could not carry out her threat. No doubt she suspects what motive you had in taking her into your own house,

count. A woman like that is no fool. But tell me, does she show no anxiety, no fear of a search?"

"None, monsieur. She knows that my people search her effects; indeed she has told me so. But it alarms her not a whit. As she told me two days ago, I shall find nothing; but if I did it would be useless, for, on the moment anything of hers was touched, her servants would see that the finder never carried it from the house."

"Oho!" said Cleek with a strong rising inflection. "A little searching party of her own, eh? The lady is clever, at all events. The moment either pearl or letter should be removed from its hiding-place her servants would allow nobody to leave the house without being searched to the very skin?"

"Yes, monsieur. So if by any chance you were to discover either——"

"My friend, set your mind at rest," interposed Cleek. "If I find either, or both, they will leave the house with me, I promise you. Mr. Narkom"—he turned to the superintendent—"keep an eye on Dollops for me, will you? There are reasons why I can't take him, can't take anybody, with me in the working out of this case. I may be a couple of days or I may be a week, I can't say as yet, but I start with Count Irma for Mauravania in the morning. And, Mr. Narkom."

"Yes, old chap?"

"Do me a favour, please. Be at Charing Cross station when the first boat train leaves to-morrow morning, will you, and bring me a small pot of extract of beef, a very small pot, the smallest they make, not bigger than a shilling nor thicker than one if they make them that size. What's that? Hide the pearl in it? What nonsense! I don't want one half big enough for that. Besides, they'd be sure to find it when they searched me if I tried any such fool's trick as that. Dollops isn't the only creature in the world that gets hungry, my friend, and beef extract is very sustaining, very, I assure you, sir."

II

"A beautiful city, count, an exceedingly beautiful city," said Cleek, as the carriage which had been sent to meet them at the station rolled into the broad Avenue des Arcs, which is at once the widest and most ornate thoroughfare the capital city of Mauravania boasts. "Ah, what a heritage! No wonder King Ulric is so anxious to retain his sovereignty; no wonder this—er—Madame Tcharnovetski, I think you said the name is——"

"Yes, monsieur. It is oddly spelled, but it is pronounced a little broader than you give it, quite as though it were written Shar-no-*vet*-skee, in fact, with the accent on the third syllable."

"Ah, yes. Thanks very much. No wonder she is anxious to become a power here. Mauravania is a fairyland in very truth; and this beautiful avenue with its arches, its splendid trees, its sculpture, its—— Ah! *cocher,* pull up at once. Stop, if you please, stop!"

"*Oui,* monsieur," replied the driver, reining in his horses and glancing round. "*Dix mille pardons,* m'sieur, there is something amiss?"

"Yes; very much amiss, from the dog's point of view," replied Cleek, indicating by a wave of the hand a mongrel puppy which crouched, forlorn and hungry, in the shadow of an imposing building. "He should be a Socialist among dogs, that little fellow, count. The mere accident of birth has made him what he is, and that poodled monstrosity the lady yonder is leading the pet and pride of a thoughtless mistress. I want that little canine outcast, count, and with your permission I will appropriate him and give him his first carriage ride." With that, he stepped down from the vehicle, whistled the cur to him, and taking it up in his arms, returned with it to his seat.

"Monsieur, you are to me the most astonishing of men," said the count, noticing how he patted the puppy and settled it in his lap as the carriage resumed its even rolling down the broad, beautiful avenue. "One moment upholding the rights of birth, the next rebelling against

the injustice of it. Are your sympathies with the unfortunate so keen, monsieur, that even this stray cur may claim them?"

"Perhaps," replied Cleek enigmatically. "You must wait and see, count. Just now I pity him for his forlornity; to-morrow, next day, a week hence, I may hold it a better course to put an end to his hopeless lot by chloroforming him into a painless and peaceful death."

"Monsieur, I cannot follow you, you speak in riddles."

"I deal in riddles, count; you must wait for the solution of them, I'm afraid."

"I wish I could grasp the solution of one which puzzles me a great deal, monsieur. What is it that has happened to your countenance? You have done nothing to put on a disguise; yet, since we left the train and entered the landau, some subtle change has occurred. What is it? How has it come about? The night before last, when I saw you for the first time, your face was one that impressed me with a sense of familiarity, now, monsieur, you are like a different man."

"I am a different man, count. Like this puppy here, I am a waif and a stray; yet, at the same time, I have my purpose and am part of a carefully laid scheme."

The count made no reply. He could not comprehend the man at all, and at times, but for the world-wide reputation of him, he would have believed him insane. Not a question as to the great and important case he was on, but merely incomprehensible remarks, trifling fancies, apparently aimless whims! Two nights ago a pot of beef extract; to-day a mongrel puppy; and all the time the hopes of a kingdom, the future of a monarch resting in his hands.

For twenty minutes longer the landau rolled on; then it came to a halt under the broad porte-cochère of the Villa Irma, and two minutes after that Cleek and the count stood in the presence of Madame Tcharnovetski, her purblind associate, and her retinue of servant-guards.

A handsome woman, this madame, a woman of about two-and-thirty, with the tar-black eyes and the twilight-

coloured tresses of Northern Russia; bold as brass, flippant as a French cocotte, steel-nerved and calm-blooded as a professional gambler. It had been her whim that all the women of the count's family should be banished from the house during her stay; that the great salon of the villa, a wondrous apartment, hung in blue and silver, and lit by a huge crystal chandelier, should be put at her disposal night and day; that the electric lights should be replaced with dozens of wax candles (after the manner of the ballrooms of her native Russia); that her one-eyed companion, with his wicker cage of screeching parakeets, should come and go when and where and how he listed, and that an electric alarm bell be connected with her sleeping apartment and his.

"Your hirelings will tamper with his birds and his effects in the night, I know that, Monsieur le Comte," she had said when she demanded this. "He is a nervous fellow, this poor Clopin; I wish him to be able to ring for help if you and your men go too far."

Clopin was sitting by the window chattering to his birds when Cleek entered, and a glance at him was sufficient to decide two points: first he was not disguised, nor was his partial blindness in any way a sham, for an idiot could have seen that the droop of the left eyelid over the staring, palpably artificial eye which glazed over the empty socket beneath was due to perfectly natural causes; and, second, that the man was indeed what the count had said he resembled, namely, a gutter-bred outcast.

"French," was Cleek's silent comment upon him. "One of those charlatans who infest the streets of Paris with their so-called 'fortune-telling birds,' who, for ten centimes, pick out an envelope with their beaks as a means of telling you what the future is supposed to hold. What has made a woman like this pick up with a fellow of his stamp? Hum-m-m! Puppy, I think you are a good move," stroking the ears of the mongrel dog; "a very much better move than a cage of useless parakeets that are meant to throw suspicion in the wrong direction and have

a seed-cup so large and so obviously overfilled that it is safe to say there is nothing hidden in it and never has been. And madame has a fancy for wax lights," his gaze travelling upward to the glittering chandelier. "Hum-m-m! How well they know, these women whose beauty is going off, that wax lights show less of Time's ravages than gas or electricity. Candles in the chandelier; candles in the sconces; candles on the mantelpiece. This room should be very charming when it is lighted at night."

It was—as he learned later. Just now things not quite so charming filled the bill, for madame was jeering at him in a manner not to be misunderstood.

"A police spy, that is what you are, monsieur!" she said, coming up to him and impudently snapping her fingers under his nose. "Such a fool this white-headed old dotard of a count, to think that he can take me in with a silly yarn about going to visit a nephew and bringing him back here to stay. Monsieur, you are a police spy. Well, good luck to you. Get what the Mauravanian king wants, if—you—can!"

"Madame," replied Cleek, with a deeply deferential bow and with an accent that seemed born of Paris, "Madame, that is what I mean to do, I assure you."

"Ah, do you?" she answered, with a scream of laughter. "You hear that, Clopin? You hear that, my good servitors? This silly French noodle is going to get the things in spite of us. Oho, but you have a fine opinion of yourself, monsieur. You need work fast, too, pretty boaster, I can tell you. For the royal jewellers will require the Rainbow Pearl very soon to fix it in its place in the crown for the coronation ceremony, and if that thing his Majesty holds is offered to them, how long, think you, will it be before all Mauravania knows that it is an imitation? Look you," waxing suddenly vicious, "I'll make it shorter still, the time you have to strive. Monsieur le Comte, take this message to his Majesty from me. If in three days he does not promise to accede to my demands and give me a public proof of it over his royal seal, I leave Mauravania. The pearl and the letter leave with

me, and they shall not come back until I return with them for the coronation."

"For the love of God, madame," said the count, "don't make it harder still. Oh, wait, wait, I beseech you!"

"Not an hour longer than I have now said!" she flung back at him. "I have waited until I am tired of it, and my patience is worn out. Three days, count; three days, monsieur with the puppy dog; three days, and not an instant longer, do you hear?"

"Quite enough, madame," replied Cleek, with a courtly bow. "I promise to have them in two!"

She threw back her head and fairly shook with laughter.

"Of a truth, monsieur, you are a candid boaster!" she cried. "Look you, my good fellows, and you too, my poor dumb Clopin, pretty monsieur here will have the letter and the pearl in two days' time. Look to it that he never leaves this house at any minute from this time forth that you do not search him from top to toe. If he resists—ah, well, a pistol may go off accidentally, and things that Mauravania's king would give his life to keep hidden will come to light if any charge of murder is preferred. Monsieur the police spy, I wish you joy of your task."

"Madame, I *shall* take joy in it," Cleek replied. "But why should we talk of unpleasant things when the future looks so bright? Come, may we not give ourselves a pleasant evening? Look, there is a piano, and—— Count, hold my puppy for me, and please see that no one feeds him at any time. I am starving him so that he may devour some of Clopin's parakeets, because I hate the sight of the little beasts. Thank you. Madame, do you like music? Listen, then; I'll sing you Mauravania's national anthem: 'God guard the throne; God shield the right!'" and, dropping down upon the seat before the open instrument, he did so.

That night was ever memorable at the Villa Irma, for the detective seemed somehow to have given place to the courtier, and so merry was his mood, so infectious his good nature, that even madame came under the spell of it. She sang with him, she even danced a Russian polka

with him; she sat with him at dinner, and flirted with him in the salon afterward; and when the time came for her to retire, it was he who took her bedroom candle from the shelf and put it into her hand.

"Of a truth, you are a charming fellow, monsieur," she said, when he bent and kissed her hand. "What a pity you should be a policy spy and upon so hopeless a case."

"Hopeless cases are my delight, madame. Believe me, I shall not fail."

"Only three days, remember, *cher ami*—only three days!"

"Madame is too kind. I have said it: two will do. On the morning of the third madame's passport will be ready and the Rainbow Pearl be in the royal jewellers' hands. A thousand pleasant dreams, *bon soir!*" And bowed her out and kissed his hand to her as she went up the stairs to bed.

III

Thrice during the next twenty-four hours Cleek, who seemed to have become so attached to the mongrel dog that he kept it under his arm continually, had reason to leave the house, and thrice was he seized by madame's henchmen, bundled unceremoniously into a convenient room, and searched to the very skin before he was suffered to pass beyond the threshold. And if so much as a pin had been hidden upon his person, it must have been discovered.

"You see, monsieur, how hopeless it is!" said the count despairfully. "One dare not rebel; one dare not lift a finger, or the woman speaks and his Majesty's ruin falls. Oh, the madness of that boast of yours! Only another twenty-four hours, only another day and then God help his Majesty!"

"God has helped him a great deal better than he deserves, count," replied Cleek. "By to-morrow night at ten o'clock be in the square of the Aquisola, please. Bring with you the passports of madame and her companions,

also a detachment of the Royal Guard, and his Majesty's cheque for the reward I am to receive."

"Monsieur! You really hope to get the things? You really do?"

"Oh, I do more than 'hope,' count, I have succeeded. I knew last night where both pearl and letter were. To-morrow night—ah, well, let to-morrow tell its own tale. Only be in the square at the hour I mention, and when I lift a lighted candle and pass it across the salon window, send the guard here with the passports. Let them remain outside, within sight, but not within range of hearing what is said and done. You alone are to enter, remember that."

"To receive the jewel and the letter?" eagerly. "Or, at least to have you point out the hiding-place of them?"

"No, we should be shot down like dogs if I undertook a mad thing like that."

"Then, monsieur, how are we to seize them? How get them into our possession, his Majesty and I?"

"From my hand, count; this hand which held them both before I went to bed last night."

"Monsieur!" The count fell back from him as if from some supernatural presence. "You found them? You held them? You took possession of them last night? How did you get them out of the house?"

"I have not done so yet."

"But can you? Oh, monsieur, wizard though you are, can you get them past her guards? Can you, monsieur, can you?"

"Watch for the light at the window, count. It will not be waved unless it is safe for you to come and the pearl is already out of the house."

"And the letter, monsieur, the damning letter?"

Cleek smiled one of his strange, inscrutable smiles.

"Ask me that to-morrow, count," he said. "You shall hear something, you and madame, that will surprise you both," then twisted round on his heel and walked hurriedly away. And all that day and all that night he danced attendance upon madame, and sang to her, and handed

her bedroom candle to her as he had done the night before, and gave back jest for jest and returned her merry badinage in kind.

Nor did he change in that when the fateful to-morrow came. From morning till night he was at her side, at her beck and call, doing nothing that was different from the doings of yesterday, save that at evening he locked the mongrel dog up in his room instead of carrying him about. And the dog, feeling its loneliness or, possibly, famishing, for he had given it not a morsel of food since he found it, howled and howled until the din became unbearable.

"Monsieur, I wish you would silence that beast or else feed it," said madame pettishly. "The howling of the wretched thing gets on my nerves. Give it some food for pity's sake."

"Not I," said Cleek. "Do you not remember what I said, madame? I am getting it hungry enough to eat one or perhaps all of Clopin's wretched little parakeets."

"You think they have to do with the hiding of the paper or the pearl, *cher ami?* Eh?"

"I am sure of it. He would not carry the beastly little things about for nothing."

"Ah, you are clever, you are very, very clever, monsieur," she made answer, with a laugh. "But he must begin his bird-eating quickly, that nuisance-dog, or it will be too late. See, it is already half-past nine; I retire to my bed in another hour and a half, as always, and then your last hope he is gone—z-zic! like that; for it will be the end of the second day, monsieur, and your promise not yet kept. Pestilence, monsieur," with a little outburst of temper, "do stop the little beast his howl. It is unbearable! I would you to sing to me like last night, but the noise of the dog is maddening."

"Oh, if it annoys you like that, madame," said Cleek, "I'll take him round to the stable and tie him up there, so we may have the song undisturbed. Your men will not want to search me, of course, when I am merely popping out and popping in again like that, I am sure?"

Nevertheless they did, for although they had heard and did not stir when he left the room and ran up for the dog, when he came down with it under his arm and made to leave the house, he was pounced upon, dragged into an adjoining apartment by half a dozen burly fellows, stripped to the buff, and searched, as the workers in a diamond mine are searched, before they suffered him to leave the house. There was neither a sign of a pearl nor a scrap of a letter to be found upon him, they made sure of that before they let him go.

"An enterprising lot, those lackeys of yours, madame," he said, when he returned from tying the dog up in the stable and rejoined her in the salon. "It will be an added pleasure to get the better of them, I can assure you."

"*Oui,* if you can!" she answered, with a mocking laugh. "Clopin, *cher ami,* your poor little parakeets are safe for the night, unless monsieur grows desperate and eats them for himself."

"Even that, if it were necessary to get the pearl, madame," said Cleek, with the utmost sang-froid. "Faugh!" looking at his watch, "a good twenty minutes wasted by the zealousness of those idiotic searchers of yours. Ten minutes to ten! Just time for one brief song. Let us make hay while the sun lasts, madame, for it goes down suddenly here in Mauravania; and for some of us it never comes up again!" Then, throwing himself upon the piano-seat, he ran his fingers across the keys and broke into the stately measures of the national anthem. And, of a sudden, while the song was yet in progress, the clock in the corridor jingled its musical chimes and struck the first note of the hour.

He jumped to his feet and lifted both hands above his head.

"Mauravania!" he cried. "Oh, Mauravania! For thee! For thee!" Then jumped to the mantelpiece, and, catching up a lighted candle, flashed it twice across the window's width, and broke again into the national hymn.

"Monsieur," cried out madame, "monsieur, what is the

meaning of that? Have you lost your wits? You give a signal! For what? To whom?"

"To the guards of Mauravania's king, madame, in honour of his safe escape from you!" he made reply; then twitched back the window curtains until the whole expanse of glass was bared. "Look! do you see them, do you, madame?" he said. "His Majesty of Mauravania sends Madame Tcharnovetski a command to leave his kingdom, since he no longer has cause to fear a wasp whose sting has been plucked out."

Her swift glance flashed to the fireplace, then to the corner where Clopin still sat with his jabbering parakeets, then flashed back to Cleek, and she laughed in his face.

"I think not, monsieur," she said, with a swaggering air. "Truly, I think not, my excellent friend."

"What a pity you only think so, madame! As for me—— Ah, welcome, count, welcome a thousand times. The paper, my friend; you have brought the paper? Good! good! Quick, give it to me. Madame, your passports—yours and your people's. You leave Mauravania by the midnight train, and you have but little time to pack your effects. Your passport, madame, and your bedroom candle. Oh, yes, the paper is still round it, see!" slipping off a sheet of white notepaper that was wrapped round the full length of the candle from top to bottom, "but if you will examine it, madame, you will find it is blank. I burned the real letter the night before last when I put this in its place."

"You what?" she snapped; then caught the tube-shaped covering he had stripped from the candle, uncurled it, and screamed.

"Blank, madame, quite blank, you see," said Cleek serenely. "For one so clever in other things, you should have been more careful. A little pinch of powder in the punch at dinner-time—just that—and on the first night, too! It was so easy afterward to get into your room, remove the real paper, and wrap the candle in a blank piece while you slept."

"You, you dog!" she snapped out viciously. "You drugged me?"

"Yes, madame; you and the one-eyed man as well. Oh, don't excite yourself; don't pull at the poor wretch like that. The glass eye will come out quite easily, but—I assure you there is only a small lump of beeswax in the socket now. I removed the Rainbow Pearl from poor Monsieur Clopin's blind eye ten minutes after I burnt the letter, madame, and it passed out of this house to-night! A clever idea to pick up a one-eyed pauper, madame, and hide the pearl in the empty socket of the lost eye, but it was too bad you had to supply a glass eye to keep it in, after the lid and the socket had withered and shrunk from so many years of emptiness. It worried the poor man, madame; he was always feeling it, always afraid that the lump behind would force it out; and, what is an added misfortune for your plans, the glass shell did not allow you to see the change when the pearl vanished and the bit of beeswax took its place. Madame Tcharnovetski, your passport. I know enough of the King of Mauravania to be sure that your life will not be safe if you are not past the frontier before daybreak!"

"Monsieur le comte—no! I thank you, but I cannot wait to be presented to his Majesty, for I, too, leave Mauravania to-night, and, like madame yonder, return to other and more promising fields," said Cleek, an hour later, as he stood on the terrace of the Villa Irma and watched the slow progress down the moonlit avenue of the carriage which was bearing Madame Tcharnovetski and her effects to the railway station. "Give me the cheque, please; I have earned that, and there is good use for it. I thank you, count. Now do an act of charity, my friend: give the little dog in the stable a good meal, and then have a surgeon chloroform him into a peaceful and a merciful death. They will find the Rainbow Pearl in his intestines when they come to dissect the body. I starved him, count, starved him purposely, poor little wretch, so that he would be hungry enough to snap at

anything in the way of food and bolt it instantly. To-night, when I went up to take him out to the stable, a thick smearing of beef extract over the surface of the pearl was sufficient; he swallowed it in a gulp! For a double reason, count, there should be a cur quartered on the royal arms of this country after to-night."

His voice dropped off into silence. The carriage containing madame had swung out through the gateway, and its shadow no longer blotted the broad, unbroken space of moonlit avenue. He turned and looked far out, over the square of the Aquisola, along the light-lined esplanade, to the palace gates and the fluttering flag that streamed against the sky above and beyond them.

"Oh, Mauravania!" he said. "An Englishman's heritage! Dear country, how beautiful! My love to your Queen, my prayers for you."

"Monsieur!" exclaimed the count, "monsieur, what juggle is this? Your face is again the face of that other night, the face that stirs memory yet does not rivet it. Monsieur, speak, I beg of you. What are you? Who are you?"

"Cleek," he made answer. "Just Cleek! It will do. Oh, Mauravania, dear land of desolated hopes, dear grave of murdered joys!"

"Monsieur!"

"Hush! Let me alone. There are things too sacred; and this——" His hands reached outward as if in benediction; his face, upturned, was as a face transfigured, and something that shone as silver gleamed in the corner of his eye. "Mauravania!" he said. "Oh, Mauravania! My country—my people—good-bye!"

"Monsieur! Dear Heaven—*Majesty!*"

Then came a rustling sound, and when Cleek had mastered himself and looked down, a figure with head uncovered knelt on one knee at his feet.

"Get up, count," he said, with a little shaky laugh. "I appreciate the honour, but your fancy is playing you a trick. I tell you I never set foot in Mauravania before, my friend."

"I know, I know. How should you, Majesty, when it was as a child at Queen Karma's breast Mauravania last saw—— Don't leave like this! Majesty! Majesty! 'God guard the right'—the pearl and the kingdom are here."

"Wrong, my good friend. The kingdom is there, where you found me in England; and so, too, is the pearl. For there is no kingdom like the kingdom of love, count, and no pearl like a good woman."

"But, Majesty——"

"Good-night, count, and many thanks for your hospitality. You are a little upset to-night, but no doubt you will be all right again in the morning. I will walk to the station and alone, if it is all the same to you."

"Majesty!"

"Dreams, count, dreams. The riddle is solved, my friend. Good luck to your country and good-bye!"

And, setting his back to the palace and the lights and the fluttering flag, and his face to the land that held her, turned and went his way—to the West—to England—to those things which are higher than crowns and better than sceptres and more precious than thrones and ermine.

THOMAS W. HANSHEW

THE MYSTERY OF THE STEEL ROOM

"Oh, blow!" said Dollops disgustedly, as the telephone bell jingled. "A body never gets a square meal in this house now that that blessed thing's been put in!" Then he laid down his knife and fork, scuttled upstairs to the instrument, and unhooked the receiver. "'Ullo! Wot's the rumpus?" he shouted into it. "Yus, this is Captain Burbage's. Wot? No, he ain't in. Dunno when he will be. Dunno where he is. Who is it that wants him? If there's any message——"

The sound of some one whistling softly the opening bars of the national anthem at the other end of the wire cut in upon his words and filled him with a sudden deep and startled interest.

"Oh, s'help me!" he said, with a sort of gasp. "The Yard!" Then, lowering his voice to a shrill whisper, "That you, Mr. Narkom? Beg yer pardon, sir. Yus, it's me—Dollops. Wot? No, sir. Went out two hours ago. Gone to Kensington Palace Gardens. Tulips is out, and you couldn't hold him indoors with a chain at tulip time. Yus, sir—top hat, gray spats; same's the captain always wears, sir."

Narkom, at the other end of the line, called back: "If I miss him, if he comes in without seeing me, tell him to wait; I'll be round before three. Good-bye!" then hung up the receiver and turned to the gentleman who stood by the window on the other side of the private office agitatedly twirling the end of his thick gray-threaded moustache with one hand, while with the other he drummed a

(From "Cleek, The Master Detective," by Thomas W. Hanshew. Copyright, 1918, by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, and by Cassell & Co., Ltd., London, England.)

nervous tattoo upon the broad oaken sill. "Not at home, Sir Henry; but fortunately I know where to find him with but little loss of time," he said, and pressed twice upon an electric button beside his desk. "My motor will be at the door in a couple of minutes, and with ordinary luck we ought to be able to pick him up inside of the next half hour."

Sir Henry—Sir Henry Wilding, Bart., to give him his full name and title—a handsome, well-set-up man of about forty years of age, well groomed, and with the upright bearing which comes of military training, twisted round on his heel at this and gave the superintendent an almost grateful look.

"I hope so, Mr. Narkom," he said agitatedly. "Time is the one important thing at present. The suspense and uncertainty are getting on my nerves so horribly that the very minutes seem endless. Remember, there are only three days before the race, and if those rascals, whoever they are, get at Black Riot before then, God help me, that's all! And if this man Cleek can't probe the diabolical mystery, they *will* get at her, too, and put Logan where they put Tolliver, the brutes!"

"You may trust Cleek to see that they don't, Sir Henry. It is just the kind of case he will glory in; and if Black Riot is all that you believe her, you'll carry off the Derby plate in spite of these enterprising gentry who—— Hallo! here's the motor. Clap on your hat, Sir Henry, and come along. Mind the step! Kensington Palace Gardens, Lennard—and as fast as you can streak it."

The chauffeur proved that he could "streak it" as close to the margin of the speed limits as the law dared wink at, even in the case of the well-known red limousine, and in a little over twenty minutes pulled up before the park gates. Narkom jumped out, beckoned Sir Henry to follow him, and together they hurried into the grounds in quest of Cleek.

Where the famous tulip beds made splotches of brilliant colour against the clear emerald of the closely clipped grass they came upon him, a solitary figure in the garb

of the elderly seaman, "Captain Burbage, of Clarges Street," seated on one of the garden benches, his hands folded over the knob of his thick walking-stick and his chin resting upon them, staring fixedly at the gorgeous flowers and apparently deaf and blind to all else.

He was not, however, for as the superintendent approached without altering his gaze or his attitude in the slightest particle, he said with the utmost calmness: "Superb, are they not, my friend? What a pity they should be scentless. It is as though Heaven had created a butterfly and deprived it of the secret of flight. Walk on, please, without addressing me. I am quite friendly with that policeman yonder, and I do not wish him to suspect that the elderly gentleman he is so kind to is in any way connected with the Yard. Examine the tulips. That's right. You came in your limousine, of course? Where is it?"

"Just outside the gates, at the end of the path on the right," replied Narkom, halting with Sir Henry and appearing to be wholly absorbed in pointing out the different varieties of tulips.

"Good," replied Cleek, apparently taking not the slightest notice. "I'll toddle on presently, and when you return from inspecting the flowers you will find me inside the motor awaiting you."

"Do, old chap, and please hurry; time is everything in this case. Let me introduce you to your client. (Keep looking at the flowers, please, Sir Henry.) I have the honour to make you acquainted with Sir Henry Wilding, Cleek; he needs you, my dear fellow."

"Delighted—in both instances. My compliments, Sir Henry. By any chance that Sir Henry Wilding whose mare, Black Riot, is the favourite for next Wednesday's Derby?"

"Yes, that very man, Mr. Cleek; and if——"

"Don't get excited and don't turn, please; our friend the policeman is looking this way. What's the case? One of 'nobbling'? Somebody trying to get at the mare?"

"Yes. A desperate 'somebody,' who doesn't stop even at murder. A very devil incarnate who seems to possess

the power of invisibility and who strikes in the dark. Save me, Mr. Cleek! All I've got in the world is at stake, and if anything happens to Black Riot, I'm a ruined man."

"Yar-r-r!" yawned the elderly sea captain, rising and stretching. "I do believe, constable, I've been asleep. Warm weather this for May. A glorious week for Epsom. Shan't see you to-morrow, I'm afraid. Perhaps shan't see you until Thursday. Here, take that, my lad, and have half-a-crown's worth on Black Riot for the Derby; she'll win it, sure."

"Thanky, sir. Good luck to you, sir."

"Same to you, my lad. Good day." Then the old gentleman in the top hat and gray spats moved slowly away, passed down the tree-shaded walk, passed the romping children, passed the Princess Louise's statue of Queen Victoria, and, after a moment, vanished. Ten minutes later, when Narkom and Sir Henry returned to the waiting motor, they found him seated within it awaiting them, as he had promised. Giving Lennard orders to drive about slowly in the least frequented quarters, while they talked, the superintendent got in with Sir Henry, and opened fire on the "case" without further delay.

"My dear Cleek," he said, "as you appear to know all about Sir Henry and his famous mare, there's no need to go into that part of the subject, so I may as well begin by telling you at once that Sir Henry has come up to town for the express purpose of getting you to go down to his place in Suffolk to-night in company with him. You are his only hope of outwitting a diabolical agency which has set out to get at the horse and put it out of commission before Derby Day, and in the most mysterious, the most inscrutable manner ever heard of, my dear chap. Already one groom who sat up to watch with her has been killed, another hopelessly paralysed, and to-night Logan, the mare's trainer, is to sit up with her in the effort to baulk the almost superhuman rascal who is at the bottom of it all. Conceive, if you can, my dear fellow, a power so crafty, so diabolical, that it gets into

a locked and guarded stable, gets in, my dear Cleek, despite four men constantly pacing back and forth before each and every window and door that leads into the place and with a groom on guard inside, and then gets out again in the same mysterious manner without having been seen or heard by a living soul. In addition to all the windows being small and covered with a grille of iron, a fact which would make it impossible for any one to get in or out once the doors were closed and guarded, Sir Henry himself will tell you that the stable has been ransacked from top to bottom, every hole and every corner probed into, and not a living creature of any sort discovered. Yet only last night the groom, Tolliver, was set upon inside the place and killed outright in his efforts to protect the horse; killed, Cleek, with four men patrolling outside, and willing to swear, each and every one of them, that nothing and no one, either man, woman, child, or beast, passed them going in or getting out from sunset until dawn."

"Hum-m-m!" said Cleek, sucking in his lower lip. "Mysterious, to say the least. Was there no struggle? Did the men on guard hear no cry?"

"In the case of the first groom, Murple, the one that was paralysed—no," said Sir Henry, as the question was addressed to him. "But in the case of Tolliver—yes. The men heard him cry out, heard him call out 'help!' but by the time they could get the doors open it was all over. He was lying doubled up before the entrance to Black Riot's stall, with his face to the floor, as dead as Julius Cæsar, poor fellow, and not a sign of anybody anywhere."

"And the horse? Did anybody get at that?"

"No; for the best of reasons. As soon as these attacks began, Mr. Cleek, I sent up to London. A gang of twenty-four men came down, with steel plates, steel joists, steel posts, and in seven hours' time Black Riot's box was converted into a sort of safe, to which I alone hold the key the instant it is locked up for the night. A steel grille about half a foot deep, and so tightly meshed that nothing bigger than a mouse could pass through, runs all round

the enclosure close to the top of the walls, and this supplies ventilation. When the door is closed at night, it automatically connects itself with an electric gong in my own bedroom, so that the slightest attempt to open it, or even to touch it, would hammer out an alarm close to my head."

"Has it ever done so?"

"Yes, last night, when Tolliver was killed."

"How killed, Sir Henry? Stabbed or shot?"

"Neither. He appeared to have been strangled, poor fellow, and to have died in most awful agony."

"Strangled! But, my dear sir, that would hardly have been possible in so short a time. You say your men heard him call out for help. Granted that it took them a full minute—and it probably did not take them half one—to open the doors and come to his assistance, he would not be stone dead in so short a time, and he was stone dead when they got in, I believe you said?"

"Yes. God knows what killed him, the coroner will find that out, no doubt, but there was no blood shed and no mark upon him that I could see."

"Hum-m-m! Was there any mark on the door of the steel stall?"

"Yes. A long scratch, somewhat semi-circular, and sweeping downward at the lower extremity. It began close to the lock and ended about a foot and a half lower."

"Undoubtedly, you see, Cleek," put in Narkom, "some one tried to force an entrance to the steel room and get at the mare, but the prompt arrival of the men on guard outside the stable prevented his doing so."

Cleek made no response. Just at that moment the limousine was gliding past a building whose courtyard was one blaze of parrot tulips, and, his eye caught by the flaming colours, he was staring at them and reflectively rubbing his thumb and forefinger up and down his chin After a moment, however:

"Tell me something, Sir Henry," he said abruptly. "Is anybody interested in your not putting Black Riot into the field on Derby Day? Anybody with whom you have

a personal acquaintance, I mean, for of course I know there are other owners who would be glad enough to see him scratched. But is there anybody who would have a particular interest in your failure?"

"Yes—one: Major Lambson-Bowles, owner of Minnow. Minnow's second favourite, as perhaps you know. It would delight Lambson-Bowles to see me 'go under'; and, as I'm so certain of Black Riot that I've mortgaged every stick and stone I have in the world to back her, I should go under if anything happened to the mare. That would suit Lambson-Bowles down to the ground."

"Bad blood between you, then?"

"Yes, very. The fellow's a brute, and—I thrashed him once, as he deserved, the bounder. It may interest you to know that my only sister was his first wife. He led her a dog's life, poor girl, and death was a merciful release to her. Twelve months ago he married a rich American woman, widow of a man who made millions in hides and leather. That's when Lambson-Bowles took up racing and how he got the money to keep a stud. Had the beastly bad taste, too, to come down to Suffolk—within a gunshot of Wilding Hall—take Elmslie Manor, the biggest place in the neighbourhood, and cut a dash under my very nose, as it were."

"Oho!" said Cleek; "then the major is a neighbour as well as a rival for the Derby plate. I see! I see!"

"No, you don't—altogether," said Sir Henry quickly. "Lambson-Bowles is a brute and a bounder in many ways, but—well, I don't believe he is low-down enough to do this sort of thing, and with murder attached to it, too, although he did try to bribe poor Tolliver to leave me. Offered my trainer double wages, too, to chuck me and take up his horses."

"Oh, he did that, did he? Sure of it, Sir Henry?"

"Absolutely. Saw the letter he wrote to Logan."

"Hum-m-m! Feel that you can rely on Logan, do you?"

"To the last gasp. He's as true to me as my own shadow. If you want proof of it, Mr. Cleek, he's going to

sit in the stable and keep guard himself to-night, in the face of what happened to Murple and Tolliver."

"Murple is the groom who was paralysed, is he not?" said Cleek, after a moment. "Singular thing that. What paralysed him, do you think?"

"Heaven knows. He might just as well have been killed as poor Tolliver was, for he'll never be any use again, the doctors say. Some injury to the spinal column, and with it a curious affection of the throat and tongue. He can neither swallow nor speak. Nourishment has to be administered by tube, and the tongue is horribly swollen."

"I am of the opinion, Cleek," put in Narkom, "that strangulation is merely part of the procedure of the rascal who makes these diabolical nocturnal visits. In other words, that he is armed with some quick-acting infernal poison, which he forces into the mouths of his victims. That paralysis of the muscles of the throat is one of the symptoms of prussic acid poisoning, you must remember."

"I do remember, Mr. Narkom," replied Cleek enigmatically. "My memory is much stimulated by these details, I assure you. I gather from them that, whatever is administered, Murple did not get quite so much of it as Tolliver, or he, too, would be dead. Sir Henry"—he turned again to the baronet—"do you trust everybody else connected with your establishment as much as you trust Logan?"

"Yes. There's not a servant connected with the hall that hasn't been in my service for years, and all are loyal to me."

"May I ask who else is in the house besides the servants?"

"My wife, Lady Wilding, for one; her cousin, Mr. Sharpless, who is on a visit to us, for another; and for a third, my uncle, the Rev. Ambrose Smeer, the famous revivalist."

"Mr. Smeer does not approve of the race track, of course?"

"No, he does not. He is absurdly 'narrow' on some

subjects, and 'sport' of all sorts is one of them. But, beyond that, he is a dear, lovable, old fellow, of whom I am amazingly fond."

"Hum-m-m! And Lady Wilding and Mr. Sharpless, do they, too, disapprove of racing?"

"Quite to the contrary. Both are enthusiastic upon the subject and both have the utmost faith in Black Riot's certainty of winning. Lady Wilding is something more than attached to the mare; and as for Mr. Sharpless, he is so upset over these rascally attempts that every morning when the steel room is opened and the animal taken out, although nothing ever happens in the daylight, he won't let her get out of his sight for a single instant until she is groomed and locked up for the night. He is so incensed, so worked up over this diabolical business, that I verily believe if he caught any stranger coming near the mare he'd shoot him in his tracks."

"Hum-m-m!" said Cleek abstractedly, and then sat silent for a long time staring at his spats and moving one thumb slowly round the breadth of the other, his fingers interlaced and his lower lip pushed upward over the one above.

"There, that's the case, Cleek," said Narkom, after a time. "Do you make anything out of it?"

"Yes," he replied; "I make a good deal out of it, Mr. Narkom, but, like the language of the man who stepped on the banana skin, it isn't fit for publication. One question more, Sir Henry. Heaven forbid it, of course, but if anything should happen to Logan to-night, who would you put on guard over the horse to-morrow?"

"Do you think I could persuade anybody if a third man perished?" said the baronet, answering one question with another. "I don't believe there's a groom in England who'd take the risk for love or money. There would be nothing for it but to do the watching myself. What's that? Do it? Certainly, I'd do it! Everybody that knows me knows that."

"Ah, I see!" said Cleek, and lapsed into silence again.

"But you'll come, won't you?" exclaimed Sir Henry

agitatedly. "It won't happen if you take up the case; Mr. Narkom tells me he is sure of that. Come with me, Mr. Cleek. My motor is waiting at the garage. Come back with me, for God's sake, for humanity's sake, and get at the bottom of the thing."

"Yes," said Cleek in reply. "Give Lennard the address of the garage, please; and—Mr. Narkom?"

"Yes, old chap?"

"Pull up at the first grocer's shop you see, will you, and buy me a couple of pounds of the best white flour that's milled; and if you can't manage to get me either a sieve or a flour dredger, a tin pepper-pot will do!"

It was two o'clock when Sir Henry Wilding's motor turned its back upon the outskirts of London, and it was a quarter past seven when it whirled up to the stables of Wilding Hall, and the baronet and his gray-headed, bespectacled and gray-spatted companion alighted, having taken five hours and a quarter to make a journey which the trains which run daily between Liverpool Street and Darsham make in four.

As a matter of fact, however, they really had outstripped the train, but it had been Cleek's pleasure to make two calls on the way, one at Saxmundham, where the paralysed Murple lay in the infirmary of the local practitioner, the other at the mortuary where the body of Tolliver was retained, awaiting the sitting of the coroner. Both the dead and the still living man Cleek had subjected to a critical personal examination, but whether either furnished him with any suggested clue he did not say. The only remark he made upon the subject was when Sir Henry, on hearing from Murple's wife that the doctor had said he would probably not last the week out, had inquired if the woman knew where to "put her hand on the receipt for the payment of the last premium, so that her claim could be sent in to the life assurance company without delay when the end came."

"Tell me something, Sir Henry," said Cleek, when he heard that, and noticed how gratefully the woman looked

at the baronet when she replied, "Yes, Sir Henry, God bless you, sir!" "Tell me, if it is not an impertinent question, did you take out an insurance policy on Murple's life and pay the premium on it yourself? I gathered the idea that you did from the manner in which the woman spoke to you."

"Yes, I did," replied Sir Henry. "As a matter of fact, I take out a similar policy, payable to the widow, for every married man I employ in connection with my racing stud."

"May I ask why?"

"Well, for one thing, they usually are too poor and have too many children to support to be able to take it out for themselves, and exercising racers has a good many risks. Then, for another thing, I'm a firm believer in the policy of life assurance. It's just so much money laid up in safety, and one never knows what may happen."

"Then it is fair," said Cleek, "to suppose, in that case, that you have taken out one on your own life?"

"Yes—rather! And a whacking big one, too."

"And Lady Wilding is, of course, the beneficiary?"

"Certainly. There are no children, you know. As a matter of fact, we have been married only seven months. Before the date of my wedding the policy was in my Uncle Ambrose's, the Rev. Mr. Smeer's, favour."

"Ah, I see!" said Cleek reflectively. Then fell to thinking deeply over the subject, and was still thinking of it when the motor whizzed into the stableyard at Wilding Hall and brought him into contact for the first time with the trainer, Logan. He didn't much fancy Logan at first blush, and Logan didn't fancy him at all at any time.

"Hur!" he said disgustedly, in a stage aside to his master as Cleek stood on the threshold of the stable, with his head thrown back and his chin at an angle, sniffing the air somewhat after the maner of a bird-dog. "Hur! If un's the best Scotland Yard could let out to ye, sir, a half-baked old softy like that, the rest of 'em must be a blessed poor lot, Ah'm thinkin'. What's un doin' now, the noodle?—snuffin' the air like he did not understand

the smell of it! He'd not be expectin' a stable to be scented with eau de cologne, would he? What's un name, sir?"

"Cleek."

"Hur! Sounds like a golf-stick an' Ah've no doubt he's got a head like one: main thick and with a twist in un. I dunna like 'tecs, Sir Henry, and I dunna like this one especial. Who's to tell as he aren't in with they devils as is after Black Riot? Naw! I dunna like him at all."

Meantime, serenely unconscious of the displeasure he had excited in Logan's breast, Cleek went on sniffing the air and "poking about," as he phrased it, in all corners of the stable; and when, a moment later, Sir Henry went in and joined him, he was standing before the door of the steel room examining the curving scratch of which the baronet had spoken.

"What do you make of it, Mr. Cleek?"

"Not much in the way of a clue, Sir Henry, a clue to any possible intruder, I mean. If your artistic soul hadn't rebelled against bare steel, which would, of course, have soon rusted in this ammonia-impregnated atmosphere, and led you to put a coat of paint over the metal, there would have been no mark at all, the thing is so slight. I am of the opinion that Tolliver himself caused it. In short, that it was made by either a pin or a cuff button in his wrist-band when he was attacked and fell. But enlighten me upon a puzzling point, Sir Henry: What do you use coriander and oil of sassafras for in a stable?"

"Coriander? Oil of sassafras? I don't know what the dickens they are. Have you found such things here?"

"No; simply smelt them. The combination is not usual —indeed, I know of but one race in the world who make any use of it, and they merely for a purpose which, of course, could not possibly exist here, unless——"

He allowed the rest of the sentence to go by default, and, turning, looked all round the place. For the first time he seemed to notice something unusual for the equipment of a stable, and regarded it with silent interest. It was nothing more nor less than a box, covered with

sheets of virgin cork, and standing on the floor just under one of the windows, where the light and air could get to a weird-looking, rubbery-leaved, orchid-like plant, covered with ligulated scarlet blossoms which grew within it.

"Sir Henry," he said, after a moment, "may I ask how long it is since you were in South America?"

"I? Never was there in my life, Mr. Cleek—never."

"Ah! Then who connected with the hall has been?"

"Oh, I see what you are driving at," said Sir Henry, following the direction of his gaze. "That Patagonian plant, eh? That belonged to poor Tolliver. He had a strange fancy for ferns and rock plants and things of that description, and as that particular specimen happens to be one that does better in the atmosphere of a stable than elsewhere, he kept it here."

"Who told him that it does better in the atmosphere of a stable?"

"Lady Wilding's cousin, Mr. Sharpless. It was he who gave Tolliver the plant."

"Oho! Then Mr. Sharpless has been to South America, has he?"

"Why, yes. As a matter of fact, he comes from there; so also does Lady Wilding. I should have thought you would have remembered that, Mr. Cleek, when—— But perhaps you have never heard? She—they—that is," stammering confusedly and colouring to the temples, "up to seven months ago, Mr. Cleek, Lady Wilding was on the —er—music-hall stage. She and Mr. Sharpless were known as 'Signor Morando and La Belle Creole' and they did a living statue turn together. It was highly artistic; people raved; I—er—fell in love with the lady and—that's all!"

But it wasn't; for Cleek, reading between the lines, saw that the mad infatuation which had brought the lady a title and an over-generous husband had simmered down as such things always do sooner or later and that the marriage was very far from being a happy one. As a matter of fact, he learned later that the county, to a woman, had refused to accept Lady Wilding; that her

ladyship, chafing under this ostracism, was for having a number of her old professional friends come down to visit her and make a time of it, and that, on Sir Henry's objecting, a violent quarrel had ensued, and the Rev. Ambrose Smeer had come down to the hall in the effort to make peace. And he learned something else that night which gave him food for deep reflection: the Rev. Ambrose Smeer, too, had been to South America. When he met that gentleman, in spite of the fact that Sir Henry thought so highly of him, and it was known that his revival meetings had done a world of good, Cleek did not fancy the Rev. Ambrose Smeer any more than he fancied the trainer, Logan.

But to return to the present. By this time the late-falling twilight of May had begun to close in, and presently—as the day was now done and the night approaching—Logan led in Black Riot from the paddock, followed by a slim, sallow-featured, small-moustached man, bearing a shotgun, and dressed in gray tweeds. Sir Henry, who, it was plain to see, had a liking for the man, introduced this newcomer to Cleek as the South American, Mr. Andrew Sharpless.

"That's the English of it, Mr. Cleek," said the latter jovially, but with an undoubted Spanish twist to the tongue. "I wouldn't have you risk breaking your jaw with the Brazilian original. Delighted to meet you, sir. I hope to Heaven you will get at the bottom of this diabolical thing. What do you think, Henry? Lambson-Bowles's jockey was over in this neighbourhood this afternoon. Trying to see how Black Riot shapes, of course, the bounder? Fortunately, I saw him skulking along on the other side of the hedge, and gave him two minutes in which to make himself scarce. If he hadn't, if he had come a step nearer to the mare, I'd have shot him down like a dog. That's right, Logan, put her up for the night, old chap, and I'll get out your bedding."

"Aye," said Logan, through his clamped teeth, "and God help man or devil that comes a-nigh her this night. God help him, Lunnon Mister, that's all Ah say!" Then

he passed into the steel room with the mare, attended her for the night, and, coming out a minute or two later, locked her up and gave Sir Henry the key.

"Broke her and trained her, Ah did; and willin' to die for her, Ah am, if Ah can't pull un through no other way," he said, pausing before Cleek and giving him a black look. "A Derby winner her's cut out for, Lunnon Mister, and a Derby winner her's goin' to be, in spite of all the Lambson-Bowleses and the low-down horse-nobblers in Christendom!" Then he switched round and walked over to Sharpless, who had taken a pillow and a bundle of blankets from the convenient cupboard, and was making a bed of them on the floor at the foot of the locked steel door.

"Thanky, sir, 'bliged to un, sir," said Logan, as Sharpless hung up the shotgun and, with a word to the baronet, excused himself and went in to dress for dinner. Then he faced round again on Cleek, who was once more sniffing the air, and pointed to the rude bed: "There's where Ted Logan sleeps this night—there!" he went on suddenly; "and them as tries to get at Black Riot comes to grips with me first, me and the shotgun Mr. Sharpless has left Ah. And if Ah shoot, Lunnon Mister, Ah shoot to kill!"

Cleek turned to the baronet.

"Do me a favour, Sir Henry," he said. "For reasons of my own, I want to be in this stable alone for the next ten minutes, and after that let no one come into it until morning. I won't be accountable for this man's life if he stops in here to-night, and for his sake, as well as for your own, I want you to forbid him to do so."

Logan seemed to go nearly mad with rage at this.

"Ah won't listen to it! Ah will stop here, Ah will! Ah will!" he cried out in a passion. "Who comes ull find Ah here waitin' to come to grips with un. Ah won't stop out —Ah won't! Don't un listen to Lunnon Mister, Sir Henry, for God's sake, don't!"

"I am afraid I must, in this instance, Logan. You are far too suspicious, my good fellow. Mr. Cleek doesn't want to 'get at' the mare; he wants to protect her: to

keep anybody else from getting at her, so join the guard outside if you are so eager. You must let him have his way." And, in spite of all Logan's pleading, Cleek did have his way.

Protesting, swearing, almost weeping, the trainer was turned out and the doors closed, leaving Cleek alone in the stable; and the last Logan and Sir Henry saw of him until he came out and rejoined them he was standing in the middle of the floor, with his hands on both hips, staring fixedly at the impromptu bed in front of the steel room door.

"Put on the guard now and see that nobody goes into the place until morning, Sir Henry," he said, when he came out and rejoined them some minutes later. "Logan, you silly fellow, you'll do no good fighting against Fate. Make the best of it and stop where you are."

That night Cleek met Lady Wilding for the first time. He found her what he afterward termed "a splendid animal," beautiful, statuesque, more of Juno than of Venus, and freely endowed with the languorous temperament and the splendid earthy loveliness which grows nowhere but under tropical skies and in the shadow of palm groves and the flame of cactus flowers. She showed him but scant courtesy, however, for she was but a poor hostess, and after dinner carried her cousin away to the billiard-room, and left her husband to entertain the Rev. Ambrose and the detective as best he could. Cleek needed but little entertaining, however, for in spite of his serenity he was full of the case on hand, and kept wandering in and out of the house and upstairs and down until eleven o'clock came and bed claimed him with the rest.

His last wakeful recollection was of the clock in the lower corridor striking the first quarter after eleven; then sleep claimed him, and he knew no more until all the stillness was suddenly shattered by a loud-voiced gong hammering out an alarm and the sound of people tumbling out of bed and scurrying about in a panic of fright. He jumped out of bed, pulled on his clothing, and rushed out into the hall, only to find it alive with startled people,

and at their head Sir Henry, with a dressing-gown thrown on over his pyjamas and a bedroom candle in his shaking hand.

"The stable!" he cried out excitedly. "Come on, come on, for God's sake. Some one has touched the door of the steel room; and yet the place was left empty, empty!"

But it was no longer empty, as they found out when they reached it, for the doors had been flung open, the men who had been left on guard outside the stables were now inside it, the electric lights were in full blaze, the shotgun still hanging where Sharpless had left it, the impromptu bed was tumbled and tossed in a man's death agony, and at the foot of the steel door Logan lay, curled up in a heap and stone dead!

"He would get in, Sir Henry; he'd have shot one or the other of us if we hadn't let him," said one of the outer guards, as Sir Henry and Cleek appeared. "He would lie before the door and watch, sir, he simply would; and God have mercy on him, poor chap; he was faithful to the last!"

"And the last might not have come for years, the fool, if he had only obeyed," said Cleek; then lapsed into silence and stood staring at a dust of white flour on the red-tiled floor and at a thin wavering line that broke the even surface of it.

It was perhaps two minutes later when the entire household, mistress, guests, and servants alike, came trooping across the open space between the hall and the stables in a state of semi-deshabille, but in that brief space of time friendly hands had reverently lifted the body of the dead man from its place before the steel door, and Sir Henry was nervously fitting the key to the lock in a frantic effort to get in and see if Black Riot was safe.

"*Dios!* what is it? What has happened?" cried Lady Wilding, as she came hurrying in, followed closely by Sharpless and the Rev. Ambrose Smeer. Then, catching sight of Logan's body, she gave a little scream and covered her eyes. "The trainer, Andrew, the trainer now!"

she went on half hysterically. "Another death—another! Surely they have got the wretch at last?"

"The mare! The mare, Henry! Is she safe?" exclaimed Sharpless excitedly, as he whirled away from his cousin's side and bore down upon the baronet. "Give me the key, you're too nervous." And, taking it from him, unlocked the steel room and passed swiftly into it.

In another instant Black Riot was led out, uninjured, untouched, in the very pink of condition and, in spite of the tragedy and the dead man's presence, one or two of the guards were so carried away that they essayed a cheer.

"Stop that! Stop it instantly!" rapped out Sir Henry, facing round upon them. "What's a horse, even the best, beside the loss of an honest life like that?" and flung out a shaking hand in the direction of dead Logan. "It will be the story of last night over again, of course? You heard his scream, heard his fall, but he was dead when you got to him—dead—and you found no one here?"

"Not a soul, Sir Henry. The doors were all locked; no grille is missing from any window; no one is in the loft; no one in any of the stalls; no one in any crook or corner of the place."

"Send for the constable, the justice of the peace, anybody!" chimed in the Rev. Ambrose Smeer at this. "Henry, will you never be warned; never take these awful lessons to heart? This sinful practice of racing horses for money——"

"Oh, hush, hush! Don't preach me a sermon now, uncle," interposed Sir Henry. "My heart's torn, my mind crazed by this abominable thing. Poor old Logan! Poor, faithful old chap! Oh!" He whirled and looked over at Cleek, who still stood inactive, staring at the flour-dusted floor. "And they said that no mystery was too great for you to get at the bottom of it, no riddle too complex for you to find the answer? Can't you do something? Can't you suggest something? Can't you see any glimmer of light at all?"

Cleek looked up, and that curious smile which Narkom knew so well, and would have known had he been there

was the "danger signal," looped up one corner of his mouth.

"I fancy it is *all* 'light,' Sir Henry," he said. "I may be wrong, but I fancy it is merely a question of comparative height. Do I puzzle you by that? Well, let me explain. Lady Wilding there is one height, Mr. Sharpless is another, and I am a third; and if they two were to place themselves side by side, and, say, about four inches apart, and I were to stand immediately behind them, the difference would be most apparent. There you are. Do you grasp it?"

"Not in the least."

"Bothered if I do either," supplemented Sharpless. "It all sounds like tommy rot to me."

"Does it?" said Cleek. "Then let me explain it by illustration," and he walked quietly toward them. "Lady Wilding, will you oblige me by standing here? Thank you very much. Now, if you please, Mr. Sharpless, will you stand beside her ladyship while I take up my place here immediately behind you both? That's it exactly. A little nearer, please—just a little, so that your left elbow touches her ladyship's right. Now then," his two hands moved briskly, there was a click-click; and then: "There you are; that explains it, my good Mr. and Mrs. Filippo Bucarelli; explains it completely!"

And as he stepped aside on saying this, those who were watching, those who heard Lady Wilding's scream and Mr. Sharpless's snarling oath and saw them vainly try to spring apart and dart away, saw also that a steel handcuff was on the woman's right wrist, its mate on the man's left one, and that they were firmly chained together.

"In the name of heaven, man," began Sir Henry, appalled by this, and growing red and white by rapid turns.

"I fancy that heaven has very little to do with this precious pair, Sir Henry," interposed Cleek. "You want the two people who are accountable for these diabolical crimes, and there they stand."

"What! Do you mean to tell me that Sharpless, that my wife——"

"Don't give the lady a title to which she has not and never had any legal right, Sir Henry. If it had ever occurred to you to emulate my example to-night and search the lady's effects, you would have found that she was christened Enriqua Dolores Torjada, and that she was married to Señor Filippo Bucarilli here, at Valparaiso in Chili, three years ago, and that her marriage to you was merely a clever little scheme to get hold of a pot of money and share it with her rascally husband."

"It's a lie!" snarled out the male prisoner. "It's an infernal policeman's lie! You never found any such thing!"

"Pardon me, but I did," replied Cleek serenely. "And what's more, I found the little phial of coriander and oil of sassafras in your room, señor, and I shall finish off the Mynga Worm in another ten minutes!"

Bucarelli and his wife gave a mingled cry, and, chained together though they were, made a wild bolt for the door; only, however, to be met on the threshold by the local constable to whom Cleek had dispatched a note some hours previously.

"Thank you, Mr. Philpotts, you are very prompt," he said. "There are your prisoners nicely trussed and waiting for you. Take them away, we are quite done with them here. Sir Henry"—he turned to the baronet—"if Black Riot is fitted to win the Derby she will win it and you need have no more fear for her safety. No one has ever for one moment tried to get at her. You yourself were the one that precious pair were after, and the bait was your life assurance. By killing off the watchers over Black Riot one by one they knew that there would come a time, when, being able to get no one else to take the risk of guarding the horse and sleeping on that bed before the steel-room door, you would do it yourself; and when that time came they would have had you."

"But how? By what means?"

"By one of the most diabolical imaginable. Among the reptiles of Patagonia, Sir Henry, there is one, a species of black adder, known in the country as the Mynga Worm, whose bite is more deadly than that of the rattler or the

copperhead, and as rapid in its action as prussic acid itself. It has, too, a great velocity of movement and a peculiar power of springing and hurling itself upon its prey. The Patagonians are a barbarous people in the main and, like all barbarous people, are vengeful, cunning, and subtle. A favourite revenge of theirs upon unsuspecting enemies is to get within touch of them and secretly to smear a mixture of coriander and oil of sassafras upon some part of their bodies, and then either to lure or drive them into the forest. By a peculiar arrangement of Mother Nature this mixture has a fascination, a maddening effect upon the Mynga Worm, just as a red rag has on a bull, and, enraged by the scent, it finds the spot smeared with it and delivers its deadly bite."

"Good heaven! How horrible! And you mean to tell me——"

"That they employed one of those deadly reptiles in this case? Yes, Sir Henry. I suspected it the very moment I smelt the odour of the coriander and sassafras, but I suspected that an animal or a reptile of some kind was at the bottom of the mystery at a prior period. That is why I wanted the flour. Look! Do you see where I sifted it over this spot near the Patagonian plant? And do you see those serpentine tracks through the middle of it? The Mynga Worm is there in that box, at the roots of that plant. Now see!"

He caught up a horse blanket, spread it on the floor, lifted the box and plant, set them down in the middle of it and, with a quick gathering up of the ends of the blanket, converted it into a bag and tied it round with a hitching strap.

"Get spades, forks, anything, and dig a hole outside in the paddock," he went on. "Make a deep hole, a yard deep at the least—then get some straw, some paraffin, turpentine, anything that will burn furiously and quickly, and we will soon finish the little beast."

The servants flew to obey, and when the hole was dug, he carried the bag out and lowered it carefully into it, covered it with straw, drenched this with a gallon or more

of lamp oil, and rapidly applied a match to it and sprang back.

A moment later those who were watching saw a small black snake make an ineffectual effort to leap out of the blazing mass, fall back into the flames, and disappear forever.

"The method of procedure?" said Cleek, answering the baronet's query as the latter was pouring out what he called "a nerve settler" prior to following the Rev. Ambrose's example and going to bed. "Very cunning, and yet very, very simple, Sir Henry. Bucarilli made a practice, as I saw this evening, of helping the chosen watcher to make his bed on the floor in front of the door to the steel room, but during the time he was removing the blankets from the cupboard his plan was to smear them with the coriander and sassafras and so arrange the top blanket that when the watcher lay down, the stuff touched his neck or throat and made that the point of attack for the snake, whose fang makes a small round spot not bigger than the end of a knitting needle, which is easily passed over by those not used to looking for such a thing. There was such a spot on Tolliver's throat; such another at the base of Murple's skull, and there is a third in poor Logan's left temple. No, no more, please; this is quite enough. Success to Black Riot and the Derby! The riddle is solved, Sir Henry. Good-night!"

GEORGE BARTON

VIDOCQ AND THE LOCKSMITH'S DAUGHTER

M. Henry, the Prefect of the Paris Police, sat at his desk in his private office, his face a picture of perplexity. He picked up a paper that lay before him and read it carefully for the third time. It was an official report of a desperate robbery that had occurred in the heart of the French capital the night before. Moreover it was one of many similar reports. There had been an epidemic of robberies, and the police seemed powerless to stop them. M. Henry summoned M. Bertaux, famed as a cross-examiner of criminals, and M. Parisot, the governor of prisons, and the three men talked long and earnestly but without coming to any conclusion. Presently a look of gratification overspread the countenance of M. Henry. He turned to his colleagues,—

"Gentlemen, I have it."

"What is it?" they called in chorus.

"Be seated," he responded, "and wait."

They did as they were bid and the Prefect touched a button. A messenger responded.

"Tell Vidocq to come here at once," said M. Henry.

In a few minutes the door opened and a strong well-built man with square shoulders shambled into the room. He had gray hair, a thick nose, blue eyes, a smooth face and a perpetual smile. He glanced about him in a furtive way and realized that he was in the presence of the triumvirate of talent that ruled the under-world of Paris. He squared himself as a man would who was preparing to be on the defensive. But the first words of the Prefect reassured him.

(From "Adventures of the World's Greatest Detectives," by George Barton. Copyright, 1909, by The John C. Winston Co., Philadelphia.)

"Vidocq, we need your assistance."

The man bowed low.

"M. Henry, I am at your service absolutely."

The Prefect handed him the report.

"Take that and read it carefully. It is one of many. The criminals are having a carnival. I want you to capture this gang. My regular police have failed. They bring me only excuses; I wish you to bring me the prisoners."

Vidocq smiled that everlasting smile and bowed again.

"It shall be as you wish, M. Henry."

He left the room with three batteries of sharp eyes leveled at him.

M. Bertaux shrugged his shoulders.

"A quack doctor sent to capture burglars."

M. Parisot spread out his hands in disgust.

"A showman's clown, a petty thief on the detective force."

M. Henry smiled blandly.

"Gentlemen, you are not alone in your disapproval. Do you see these papers?"—pointing to a high pile on the side of his desk—"these are all protests and complaints against the employment of Vidocq. Some are from honest men; some from thieves. But he shall have his chance. His past is behind him; his future is in his own hands. I shall judge him solely by results."

II

Vidocq spent all morning in going over the reports that had been placed in his hands. After that he returned to his lodgings, and throwing himself on the bed lay awake all night devising a plan of campaign. When daylight arrived, it was completely blocked out in his mind—not a detail was overlooked.

The first step was to discard his own personality and take up that of another. It would have to be a thief. The honor of being impersonated fell to one Germain, alias "the Captain." He was a fugitive galley-slave. Vidocq

had known him in the days—well, in the days before he became a detective. Germain had dark brown hair; that of Vidocq was light; he was thin, Vidocq was stout; his complexion was sallow, that of Vidocq was clear. But the resourceful detective overcame all of these obstacles. Days were employed in perfecting the likeness. First he attained a seven days' growth of beard. Then he dyed his hair and beard black. By the generous use of white walnut liquor he attained a most unhealthy complexion. The original was a snuff fiend. Vidocq garnished his upper lip with a mixture of coffee grounds and gum arabic. He made blisters on his feet by rubbing in a composition with which he was familiar. He made the marks of the fetters on his ankles and dressing himself in a suitable garb was ready for his enterprise.

After that he became a regular frequenter of the thieves' dens of Paris. He drank cheap gin, tossed off absinthe, cursed the police, showed the marks of the irons on his legs and altogether made himself a general favorite. Night after night he visited a cheap concert hall in the Faubourg St. Germain where he met most of the disreputable characters of the French metropolis. He became very friendly with most of them and made them drink his health in sundry glasses of bad wine. The resort was a veritable clearing-house for the gossip of the under-world. A man or a woman who had not "served time" was out of place in that assemblage. Talk of burglaries past and prospective was as free as remarks concerning the state of weather. Vidocq told his experiences with great vividness and with a degree of exaggeration that would have won a medal from the Ananias Club.

Among so many little thieves there was one big thief. His name was Constantine, a former fencing-master who, having run the gamut of dissipation, had now reached the closing stages of crime in his ill-spent life. His companions looked upon him as a man of enterprise—bold in execution and on all occasions possessing the most unblushing effrontery. The attention of the police had

been directed to him more than once but they had never been able to secure the least scintilla of evidence against the man.

Vidocq, knowing this, moved cautiously. He knew that a misstep might mean his own life, for he was in the midst of desperate characters who thought nothing of murder. He put on a sad face, bemoaned his own fate, and bewailed the fact that he had no means of recouping his fallen fortunes. He became friendly with one of the intimates of Constantine, and that worthy, being plied with liquor, gave the detective full particulars of the habits of the big thief. They passed the night together and before morning Vidocq knew all about the haunts of Constantine.

On the following day he again met his voluble informant in the dance hall on the Faubourg St. Germain. He was quite excited.

"Would you like to meet Constantine?" he asked Vidocq.

"Most assuredly!" replied the detective.

They remained in conversation for some time. Presently the door opened and a smart-looking fellow came in. Vidocq's companion plucked at his sleeve.

"Now is your time if you wish to speak to Constantine —he is here."

The detective looked up and saw a neatly dressed man of thirty with good broad shoulders. He was about five feet six inches high, extremely good looking, fine black hair and regular teeth. Vidocq waited only long enough for the newcomer to be seated when he went up to him carelessly and said:

"Would you kindly oblige me with a little tobacco from your box?"

The famous thief looked the detective over from head to foot before replying. After an embarrassing interval, Constantine passed his tobacco box to Vidocq. Then he said abruptly:

"You have been in the army?"

The detective could have fallen to the floor. Had all of

his carefully-contrived disguise counted for nothing? Did Constantine know who he was? In any event it would serve his interest to answer the question truthfully. So with pretended nonchalance he said:

"Why, yes, how did you know it?"

"Simply because no man can conceal it. Once in the army you carry the badge of it with you through life, in your walk, in your shoulders, in your talk, in your manners."

Vidocq laughed uproariously as if he considered this a good joke, and in the confusion invited his new-found friend to take a drink. He accepted, and in the course of their conversation the detective was delighted to find that the other had not penetrated his disguise.

"I like you," finally cried Constantine, "and I want you to take dinner with some friends of mine."

That night Vidocq dined with a party of charming cracksmen, every one of them noted in his profession. Constantine was the chief, Joubert his able lieutenant, and the others faithful followers. The wine flowed freely and the best of feeling prevailed. One of the company said facetiously that he had just come into a fortune and was celebrating the event. As a matter of fact, he had "cracked a crib" the night before and was spending part of his ill-gotten wealth; Constantine, turning to Vidocq, said:

"How's your nerve?"

"Fine."

"Are you in for an adventure?"

"Surely, with whom?"

"With the locksmith's daughter."

Vidocq made a grimace as if mocking and said:

"I don't believe I ever had the honor of the lady's acquaintance."

All hands laughed loudly at this sally. Constantine put his hands down into his pocket and produced a big brass key. He handed it gravely to the detective.

"Permit me to present you to the minx."

Vidocq, keeping up the spirit of the thing, bowed

gravely, acknowledging the introduction and inquired when he would have the pleasure of going out with the lady.

"It might be to-night," he said grumblingly, "if it were not for that infernal Vidocq."

The detective pricked up his ears at the mention of his own name. He preserved the gravity of his countenance, however, as he remarked carelessly:

"Oh, I don't mind him if I can keep clear of the informers. They tell me Paris swarms with the parasites."

"That's true," said Constantine, "but if you can keep Vidocq from guessing at your business, you are safe enough with me. As for these informers, I don't fear them. I can smell those beggars as easily as a crow scents powder."

"Well," said Vidocq, "I cannot boast of so much penetration, yet I think, too, that from the frequent description I have heard of this Vidocq, his features are so well engraved in my recollection that I should pretty soon recognize him, if I came unexpectedly in his way."

"God bless you!" cried Constantine, "it is easy to perceive you are a stranger to the vagabond; just imagine now, that he is never to be seen twice in the same dress; that he is in the morning perhaps just such another looking person as you; well, the next hour so altered that his own brother could not recognize him, and by the evening I defy any man to remember ever having seen him before. Only yesterday, I met him disguised in a manner that would have deceived any eye but mine, but he must be a deep hand if he gets over me; I know these sneaks at the first glance, and if my friends were as knowing as myself, his business would have been done long ago."

"Nonsense," cried Vidocq, "everybody says the same thing of him, and yet you see there is no getting rid of him."

Constantine was on his feet at once, with an oath. He cried out:

"To prove that I can act as well as talk, if you will lend me a helping hand, this very evening we will waylay

him at his door, and I'll warrant we'll settle the job, so as to keep him from giving any of us further uneasiness."

Vidocq immediately agreed, and was placed in the unique position of going out with a party of thieves to waylay himself. They actually went to the home of the detective, but, as may be imagined, he did not appear, and after three hours of waiting they gave up the vigil in disgust.

Many days had passed and still Vidocq was without the specific evidence which would enable him to put his hand on the shoulders of Constantine and say, "Thou art the man!" Of one thing he was morally certain; it was that the erstwhile fencing-master was at the head of a band of resourceful and unscrupulous thieves. One night, after a jollification at the dance hall, the crisis came.

"Friend," said Constantine with a leer, "do you feel like an adventure to-night?"

"With whom?" asked Vidocq.

"With my lady-love—the locksmith's daughter."

"I'll join you with all my heart!" exclaimed the detective in undisguised sincerity.

The plot was revealed with great attention to details. The cracksmen had been "spotting" the mansion of a wealthy banker on one of the boulevards of Paris. Through the treachery of a housemaid who had been smitten with the charms of Constantine the gang had been provided with the key which would admit them into the garden of the house. Vidocq listened very attentively and occasionally answered in monosyllables. He was careful not to say anything which would expose him to the reproach of having caused them to commit crime.

"Midnight is the hour," said Constantine, "and I want every man to do his duty."

There were six in the party—including Vidocq. Each of the cracksmen was assigned to his part in the enterprise. Constantine was in command and Joubert was chief of staff. Vidocq was to be lifted into a ground floor window, but the detective demurred to this particular assignment on the plea that he was as yet only a novice.

"He has a weak stomach," sneered Joubert, "he will never make a good cracksman."

Constantine hotly repelled the insinuation. He put his hand on Vidocq's shoulder affectionately and said:

"When this boy has had a little more experience, he will beat you all in the business."

Vidocq smiled in a sickly way at this unexpected, if dubious, compliment. It seemed a shame to deceive such a big-hearted scoundrel. But then, business is business, and it was too late to turn back now. It was finally arranged that Vidocq should remain on the outside of the garden wall and give the alarm if the police should come in sight. It was now within an hour of the time when they should sally forth on their unlawful mission.

"Come boys," cried Constantine, "a drink all around and then we'll get down to business."

On the plea of searching for his hat and coat Vidocq contrived to separate himself from the others for a few minutes. He wrote a hurried message on the back of an old envelope and finding a gendarme in the vicinity of the restaurant dispatched him with the note to the nearest Prefecture. It was to the point. It told of the place of rendezvous and added:

> Have half a dozen men on the spot. Frighten the cracksmen but make no arrest until they have been driven to a place of refuge.

When Vidocq returned to the table, his unsuspecting confederates were preparing to leave. Their final toast was "Success," drunk standing and in silence. Under the exhilarating influence of their liquor they had scarcely noticed the momentary absence of the detective. Once on the outside they hurried along rapidly, choosing the narrow and less frequented thoroughfares. In about twenty minutes they reached their destination. Constantine halted and, putting his hand in his hip pocket, pulled out a glistening revolver, which he examined carefully. Vidocq was not a cowardly man, but the resolute manner in which

the chief thief scrutinized his weapon sent a cold shiver down his spinal column. Constantine then gathered his men about him and distributed a half dozen black masks which they adjusted with the ease that comes from long practice. After that the chief advanced to the gate with his brass key—the famous locksmith's daughter. To his surprise it would not work. He fumbled with it for nearly a minute and then gave it up as a bad job.

"Blast the girl!" he muttered. "She's permitted them to bolt the door from the inside."

"Perhaps she's peached," whispered Vidocq insinuatingly.

"She wouldn't dare," cried Constantine, showing his teeth. "She knows me, and she knows that I would kill an informer."

Once again that cold shiver ran up and down Vidocq's spinal column. But it was merely a fleeting emotion. He had nerve in plenty and to spare.

"Boys," called the chief, "we've got to jump the wall and get down to business. We can't fool around all night. Here you"—to the detective—"give us a hand."

Vidocq planted himself against the wall of the garden and, holding out his two hands, boosted the cracksmen over the wall one at a time. Constantine was the last one up. He held his hand down to Vidocq and assisted him to the top of the stone coping.

"Now Germain," said Constantine to the detective, "you get in the shadow near the end of the wall and keep a sharp lookout. If you see the police, give a low whistle. Be on the alert, because everything depends on you."

Vidocq nodded his head.

"Yes," he repeated significantly, "everything depends on me."

Two of the men had dark lanterns. Slowly, cautiously, they felt their way toward the house. Constantine carried a complete burglar's kit. He got to work immediately.

Vidocq on the wall watched the operation intently. What a unique position! He felt like an umpire for society

at that moment. The thieves on one side of the wall, the officers of the law on the other. And himself in the middle. Truly everything depended on him.

"Tick, tick, tick," came the low, sharp sound of the metallic instrument.

Finally the shutter was forced. After that a pane of glass was cut and then nothing stood between the burglars and their booty. Five minutes, ten minutes, they worked there industriously. Everything was done with business-like precision. Four stout bags stood with yawning mouths ready to receive the swag.

Vidocq looked on the outside of the wall. The streets were deserted. Not a soul was in sight. Had his note miscarried? Would the police fail him? It looked that way. What a predicament for a sleuth! To be the confederate of thieves! If one of his many enemies should catch him in such a position he might have a hard time explaining to M. Henry. Presently a measured tread was heard on the hard sidewalk. His heart bounded. It was a squad of police. He leaned over and whispered,

"Hist!"

A captain of police approached.

"It is I—Vidocq," called the detective in a subdued voice. "I will give the alarm but I wish you to let them go their way. Two of them are armed. Presently come to my old lodgings."

The captain saluted and with his men sought shelter. At the same moment Vidocq gave a low prolonged whistle. Instantly there was a commotion within. Bags were grabbed up and all scampered toward the wall.

"It's the police," whispered Vidocq, "come quickly and you may escape."

They unbolted the gate and hurried out. Vidocq joined them.

"Where are the police?" whispered Constantine.

"They've gone the other way," said Vidocq. "If we're careful we can elude them."

They hurried along for a few blocks. The detective turned to the chief cracksman:

"It's dangerous to go through the streets with these bags. Here's my old lodgings. Let's creep in here for shelter?"

"Can you get in?" asked Constantine.

"Sure," replied Vidocq. "I have my key and I know the room's vacant."

Silently they crept inside one at a time and closed the door behind them. Constantine slapped Vidocq on the back.

"You're a brick, Germain. I told you he'd distinguish himself, boys."

"What do you call this place?" asked Joubert, looking around him.

"I call it the mouse-trap," said Vidocq with a leer.

The cracksmen laughed loudly at this sally.

The swag was poured out on the table and the enterprising gentlemen were soon engaged in dividing their rich haul. Constantine and Joubert, the only ones who possessed weapons, laid their pistols on a chair. Slyly Vidocq picked them up and secreted them under a mattress. In the midst of the exultation a loud knocking was heard at the door. The thieves looked at one another with pale faces. Vidocq crawled under the bed, unobserved. No sooner was he out of sight than the door was burst open and a swarm of inspectors and policemen entered the room. In the twinkling of an eye five pairs of handcuffs were shoved on the wrists of the cracksmen, and they were being marched to the nearest police station.

III.

It was New Year's Day at the Prefecture of Police. M. Henry, following a long-established custom, was holding his annual reception. The room was crowded and all of the officers of the police, high and low, were there to present their chief with the compliments of the season. M. Bertaux, the cross-examiner of criminals, and M. Parisot, the governor of prisons, were in the line receiving

with M. Henry. During a lull in the crowd the three men drifted into a conversation concerning crime.

"By the by, M. Henry," said M. Bertaux, "what has become of the fellow Vidocq?"

"I really do not know," said the Prefect gravely.

"What!" exclaimed the other, "not know!"

"No," was the response. "I have not seen him since the day I called him in, in your presence, and delegated him to break up the burglaries that have disgraced the police system of the city."

"And the burglaries," continued the other tauntingly, "they have continued?"

M. Henry nodded.

"And Vidocq—he has disappeared?"

The Prefect nodded again.

M. Bertaux burst into an ironical laugh.

"M. Henry, you have been deceived; taken in; hoodwinked."

The Prefect shook his head.

"I am not ready to confess defeat."

At that moment a great commotion was heard on the outside. An attendant was summoned.

"What is the confusion?"

"All of the valuables stolen from the banker's house in the Champs Elysées have been recovered."

"Good," retorted M. Henry, "but is that all?"

"No, Vidocq is outside demanding admittance; he has no card."

"Admit him!" snapped the Prefect.

A moment later five men, handcuffed, entered the room. Bringing up the rear was Vidocq. The first prisoner was Constantine, the others Joubert and his companions. Vidocq made a profound bow, and, smiling his perpetual smile, pointed to the cursing culprits:

"M. Henry, I wish you the compliments of the season and, as a New Year's gift, present to you the redoubtable Constantine and his fellow cracksmen."

WILLIAM B. MAXWELL

SUSPICION

Old Mrs. Mayhew lived with her nephew in that still unchanged part of Tudor Green which lies between the High Street and the river; and if you ran through the population of the whole suburb you would not meet a kinder person.

"Richard, I see what it is," she said to the nephew. "I am in for one of my big tidyings;" and she laughed good-humouredly.

For some time she had been missing things and saying, "Of course I know it's safe, but I simply cannot find it high or low;" saying also, as people so often observe on such occasions, that she believed some naughty imp of darkness gets into inanimate objects and helps them to hide themselves.

"Or are *you* the naughty imp, Aunt Kate?"

This gently facetious question alluded to the fact that Mrs. Mayhew had a trick of stowing away her little treasures with the greatest possible care and then forgetting where she had put them.

"Don't be a tease, Dick. . . . Yes, I'll have a real tidy-up. It's long overdue—only I have shirked the effort. But I'll be brave;" and she gave the sigh of mingled resignation and revolt that is emitted by all kind stout elderly ladies when spurring themselves to physical labour. Then she laughed again. "I shall enjoy it when once I'm fairly started."

Now, on a summer morning, when Dick, who was a student at the London University, had just gone off to the railway station, she became brave and attacked the task.

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A soft yet refreshing air blew in at the windows; above the tops of some lofty elms near the river a few rooks were holding a small parliament or committee-meeting; and high over everything, in the clear stainless sky, little white clouds like flocks of scattered sheep were being driven by the west wind towards a vast invisible penfold on the far side of London. It was one of those sparkling joyous mornings on which people find a difficulty in not feeling happy, and Mrs. Mayhew as she pulled out the contents of a large cupboard in the spare bedroom felt extraordinarily happy.

She had so much for which to be thankful. Deep in her benevolent and affectionate heart she offered thanks for this snug little Georgian house that had come to her from her parents with all the nice old furniture; for dear Dick, her nephew, doing so well in his studies and going to do so well in life; for these dress lengths bought at special sales and not yet made up, these lamp shades, these friendly familiar odds and ends; for her pleasant acquaintances and trusted neighbours; for Mrs. Skeat her cook—whose mellow voice she had just heard floating up to her from the comfortable depths of the house, as the good soul spoke to Doris on the kitchen stairs.

Each opened drawer of a tall chest set free a dozen memories. Here, folded in tissue paper, was a broken desk that she had used as a little girl; here was a leather portfolio that belonged to her father. Ah! Here was grandmamma's church-service—bound with two pieces of yellow ivory—one of the pieces unglued, loose. . . . She sighed. Poor grandmamma!

"But this won't do," she said to herself. "I must not waste time. I must get on with it—methodically;" and she bustled back to her own bedroom, pausing to look down into the hall as she crossed the landing.

Down there Doris the house-parlourmaid was singing softly as she dusted the panels. She looked neat and nice in her lavender print dress—a beam of sunlight from the glass over the front door making her hair shine like

polished bronze. The sight of the girl and the sound of her song were very pleasant to the eyes and ears of the kind mistress. Yes, it is glorious when you can make other people happy too; there is immense pride and satisfaction when, seeking to do a little good in this world which is so easy for some, so cruelly hard for others, you voluntarily take a risk but are rewarded by the triumphant success of your courageous experiment.

Time passed—an hour, more. Mrs. Mayhew had fairly started, but she was not enjoying it. She could not find the missing articles.

"Mrs. Skeat. Mrs. Skeat." She had been ringing her bell and she leaned over the rail of the staircase. "Oh, Doris, please ask Mrs. Skeat to come up to me."

The faithful cook—"my sheet anchor," as Mrs. Mayhew always described her—came up the stairs slowly and heavily, breathing hard; and she stood by her mistress, who was on her knees, slightly agitated, a little dusty and dishevelled.

"Mrs. Skeat, those things I'm looking for. I can't find them. They're gone."

"Gone!" said Mrs. Skeat stolidly. "How can they be gone, ma'am?"

"Well, that's what I ask myself. That's what's upsetting me. I—I believe they have been *taken.*"

"Taken!" said Mrs. Skeat in the same tone. Then she smiled tolerantly. "Who should have taken them, ma'am?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Mayhew helplessly. "It's very odd—mysterious even. I can't understand."

"What is it, exactly, that you've mislaid, ma'am?"

Mrs. Mayhew told her—a china bon-bon dish that had been given to her last Christmas, four yards of silk brocade from a spring sale, a cup and saucer that she had intended to present to a god-child on the little girl's fourth birthday, and so on. "But that's not all. I seem now to miss dozens and dozens of things."

"I expect you've put 'em by somewhere."

"Come into Mr. Richard's room;" and Mrs. Mayhew

scrambled to her feet. "Come and see the state of the corner cupboard."

"You haven't lugged that open too? Why, his washstand was blocking the door."

"I pulled it away. Mrs. Skeat, that cupboard that used to be so full is half empty."

"Jiminy!" said Mrs. Skeat, and she ceased to smile and became very serious. "Let me look, ma'am. Seeing's believing."

They went into Dick's room. Here in the corner there was a deep cupboard that had served as a sort of final stronghold; into it went things that might not be wanted for ages, things one knew one could never use again but did not care to sell; things good in themselves yet somehow become disgraced or hopelessly out of fashion—as, for instance, the big blue and gold vases from the dining-room chimney-piece, the Neptune clock disliked by Dick, the ice-making machine that would not make ices. That imbecile apparatus was still there, but none of the other things rapidly enumerated by Mrs. Mayhew. The cupboard showed itself more than half empty.

"No two ways," said Mrs. Skeat, with portentous gravity. "This has been *got* at."

Then they both sat down to talk about the mystery—Mrs. Mayhew nervous, agitated, moving her hands; Mrs. Skeat solemn and unemotional, with her hands resting quietly on her tremendous knees. She was a very large woman, and her broad fat face, of a naturally bright complexion, had grown pallid and lustreless in the course of years, gathering to itself moreover some ugly patches of a purple or copper tint; she made a noise in breathing because of her tendency to asthma; and she was untidy to the edge of slovenliness in regard to her attire—altogether, it must be confessed, not a cook-housekeeper to win you by external charm if you met her seeking a new situation at a registry office. But for her mistress she was simply Mrs. Skeat—neither more nor less. "My sheet anchor, as I call her." Now, as always, something tranquillising and reassuring seemed to flow from her. Merely

to listen to her speaking so imperturbably and sensibly rendered one calmer.

"Robbers—burglars! Mrs. Skeat, we might all have been murdered in our beds."

"Oh, no, ma'am, let's keep within bounds," said Mrs. Skeat. "This is pilfering, not house-breaking. You may be sure it's been pinched in daylight hours;" and almost immediately she suggested a certain milkman as the probable culprit.

But Mrs. Mayhew, after entertaining the notion for a few moments, dismissed it. Impossible. The milkman transacted business on the basement level and never by any chance could have come upstairs to the bedrooms.

Then Mrs. Skeat suggested some painters and plumbers; and then, as if with an inspiration, she offered a name. "Bradley! You may depend on it, it's Bradley."

Bradley was a man who used to do odd jobs for them. He had now left the neighbourhood.

"No," said Mrs. Mayhew. "Bradley had a heart of gold. I often talked to him about his wife and children."

"I never liked him," said Mrs. Skeat. "And remember, ma'am, how he was allowed to prowl all over the house—upstairs here, just as much as down below."

Mrs. Mayhew leaped to her feet again, under the stress of a new thought. "Downstairs! We must look if anything has gone from the ground floor."

The rest of the morning was a nightmare. Things were missing from the drawing-room. How many things Mrs. Mayhew could not say. She could not remember, she could not think, because of her agitation. But without the slightest doubt a painted snuff box had gone from the panelled wall beside the hearth, and out of a table with a glass top had been taken a tiny Chinese fan and an antique silver punch ladle. With a hand held to her trembling lips, she vowed that she was nearly certain she had seen the ladle, in its proper place under the glass, less than a week ago.

"Well, well. It's the old story," said Mrs. Skeat, in a lugubriously philosophical tone. "Too much furniture and too many ornaments—so's you really don't know half the time what you *have* got or what you *haven't* got;" and she moved towards the door.

"Oh, don't leave me, Skeat."

"Back in a minute;" and Mrs. Skeat, mindful of routine duties even in the hour of crisis, went to the kitchen stairs and called down them. "Doris. Put the chicken pie in the oven, and the potatoes on the fire."

Alone in the drawing-room Mrs. Mayhew had been seized with a fresh and most atrocious fear. She rushed to a delightful Queen Anne bureau in which she kept some sacred relics.

"Thank heavens!"

The small velvet case was there. But as she opened it she uttered a cry. The case was empty. The locket—her greatest treasure—the locket with her father's portrait—had disappeared.

"Well, well," said Mrs. Skeat. "Upon my word. What next?" She seemed at the end of her consolatory resources, and was unable to do more than make exclamations. "There! Well, indeed!" At last she resumed her philosophical tone. "Fortunately, it isn't of very large value itself—that is, I think I've heard you say so. Not real gold."

"I would sooner have lost my right hand," said poor Mrs. Mayhew, with the exaggeration of despair; and then in a distraught manner she told Mrs. Skeat not to say a word about the catastrophe to anybody.

"Oh! Not mention it to Doris?"

"No. Not a word to anybody—at least, not till I have had Mr. Richard's advice."

"Very good, ma'am."

Then Mrs. Mayhew sat by herself and suffered. She was overwhelmed by her discovery; it was altogether too big for her; it shook her quiet peaceful life to its very foundations. She felt a horrid emptiness and coldness inside her; she shivered. She shrank from, while revolting

against, this sense of insecurity where all had been secure; this notion of being surrounded by invisible evil, by dark malevolent purpose, by sinister mysteries, when she had thought the world kindly, well-intentioned, full of sunlight and fresh air. It was as if she had just learnt that a chimney beam was smouldering and about to burst into flames, or that the drainage was defective and they were threatened with typhoid fever—or that the house was *haunted*. She shivered again. A terrifying fancy, that—ghost and robber combined; an imperceptible figure, flitting secretly, now here now there, upstairs, downstairs; *taking things*. Above all else, she suffered from the inrush of suspicion; suspicion, dark, voluminous, irresistible, creeping through her mind, taking possession of it, filling it—filling it so completely that the old good trustful thoughts had no space left for them, and after trying to make themselves small, smaller still, gave way and were driven out.

She could not eat the chicken pie or the potatoes, and Doris looked at her with sympathetic anxiety as she nibbled her biscuits and cheese. And when Doris was not watching her she was watching Doris. All at once she yielded to an impulse, and doing what she had said was not to be done, she told Doris of the trouble. She chose a moment when Doris was busy at the side-board with her back to the table.

"Yes, Doris, these are the circumstances. Of course it means that we have had a series of thefts."

"Thefts!" Doris had become deadly pale, and she turned a scared face to the table. "Oh, ma'am, how dreadful!"

"You understand I'm not blaming you for negligence—or anything."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Doris, falteringly.

Late in the afternoon when Richard came home and learnt the news, he asked at once, "What does Mrs. Skeat say?"

"She thinks it was Bradley."

"Oh, no."

"That's what I say myself. But, if not—Oh, Richard, what are we to do?"

"Why, obviously, inform the police."

"The police! Would you really tell the police?"

Richard said certainly he would tell them without a minute's delay; and Mrs. Mayhew, although appalled at this widening and opening out of the affair, felt a great if temporary relief in hearing his decision. Perhaps not till that moment had she realised that her dear Richard was quite grown-up. There was comfort in having him solid and firm to lean upon—a *man*. Big and substantial as Mrs. Skeat could claim to be, she was after all only another woman.

"All right. Yes, I agree. But tell them, Dick dear, it's the locket. The locket's all I really care about. And say if I can only get that back I don't want to be vindictive or have all the fuss and cruelty of prosecuting the thief. I would even pay him—give him a reward—"

Dick walked across the Green to the police station. As he passed from all the noise and traffic of the crowded High Street into the quiet, dimly lighted hall he had an impression commonly felt by such innocent visitors, that he was touching the outer, smaller wheels of a vast and terrible machine concerning the work of which he knew nothing and wished to know nothing. In a flash he noticed a printed bill that spoke of a dead body. In another flash he noticed a door with the word "Cells" above it; and more rapidly than he had ever imagined anything in all his life, he seemed to see on the other side of the closed door the immense broadening avenue of shame and punishment—the police van, the magistrate's court, the Old Bailey, the remands prison, and the open sunlit moor with convicts dressed like clowns, linked together like beasts, and a warder standing on a stone wall rifle in hand. He felt pity and horror as he imagined some guilty wretch being led through that door. Instinctively he spoke in a low grave voice as he narrated his business.

A genial inspector without a cap and a sun-burnt constable without a helmet listened attentively. They promised

at once to send notices round to all the pawnbrokers of the district; the usual questions were asked; and then the constable slowly wrote it down in a book.

"Gold locket," said the constable, writing. "Real gold?"

"As to that I am not positive. We always spoke of it as gold."

"Gold or imitation," wrote the constable. "Surrounded by small pearls. Real pearls?"

"No, I doubt if they are."

"Sham pearls. Very good, sir. Contents of locket?"

"A small photograph, coloured by hand; the portrait of my great-uncle—name, Captain Leonard Mayhew,—shown in military uniform, with the old-fashioned epaulettes—white-haired and—"

"Image of a male person," wrote the constable, condensing the description. "Very good, sir."

And so it went on.

Finally the genial inspector asked, "No suspicion of any one?"

"No. None."

"What about the servants in the house?"

"We only keep two."

"No reason to suspect either of them?"

There was the slightest pause or hesitation before Dick replied.

"No. No reason."

"Nothing detrimental in their past history?"

Again Dick hesitated, and the inspector looked hard at him.

"No," said Dick firmly. "Nothing whatever."

"That is, not to your knowledge?"

"No."

Then Dick delivered his aunt's message about being content with the restoration of the property; but the inspector waved that away severely. Condoning of felonies was not of course his line at all.

"I see," said Dick feebly. "Ah, then, is there anything more I can do?"

"No, sir," said the inspector, with restored geniality.

"It's up to *us* to do something now. We'll keep you informed—should there be further developments. . . . Good evening, sir."

It was still only twilight when he got home and gave his aunt a report of the interview. She was in the front room—the dining-room—looking out of the window, waiting for him. Amongst other things he told her of his embarrassment when questioned so searchingly.

"Of course," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper, "I didn't let out a word about Doris. But I suppose you have thought of her—as a possibility?"

"Dick, I cannot—I *will* not suspect Doris;" and Mrs. Mayhew began to walk about the dusky room.

"No, Aunt Kate. I don't want to suspect her either. But one remembers what people say;" and his whispered words were only just audible. "'Once a thief, always a thief.' One can't help thinking of that."

Mrs. Mayhew went back to her seat by the window, and with the night falling on the front garden, the lime trees, and the vague expanse of the Green, she thought of it. Indeed she had thought of it, consciously or unconsciously, ever since the trouble began.

Doris had been a thief—as a young girl, with all sorts of extenuating circumstances. She had been convicted, imprisoned, rescued. She had been taken into the household of a noble and philanthropic lady, trained as a servant; then she had come here; and for two and a half years it had been a pride and joy in Mrs. Mayhew's life to find her honest, respectable, grateful, devoted—as good a girl as ever breathed. The fact of her early lapse was known only to four people—to Mrs. Mayhew, Dick, Mrs. Skeat, and to her lover and future husband. It was Doris herself who had insisted that the young man should be told, and Mrs. Mayhew had done it—here in this room. For a minute or so the young man had seemed to waver; he had stood at this window, with his back turned, as if struggling with himself; then he had said it was all right and he would overlook the past.

"That's fine of you," said Mrs. Mayhew, delighted.

"Now run down to her and take her mind off the rack."

"No," said the young man loudly, almost as it seemed aggressively, "*You* go down and tell her you've told me—and strike me dumb if I ever mention it—much less throw it in her face. Tell her"—and he made quite a dignified gesture—"that I don't want any allusions to it on her side either."

Mrs. Mayhew obeyed him, and when presently he himself went down she heard him speak cheerily to the girl, just in his usual way—"What, ain't you got your hat on yet? Where's our walk?" A fine fellow! Mrs. Mayhew had been touched.

"Dick," she cried now, "turn on the lights. Oh, turn on the lights. It's this horrible suspicion—like—like a dark cloud—making one ready to believe anything."

"Just so," said Dick, moving the switches; and they stood blinking at each other, dazzled by the sudden glare.

"Nevertheless—"

"One moment," said Dick; and he cautiously opened the door, and shut it after making sure there was nobody in the hall. "Yes?"

And they whispered again, as though they had been two conspirators.

"It's nothing really—but I feel I mustn't keep it back from you. . . . When I told her what I'd missed she turned as white as my table napkin. She seemed *frightened.*"

"Oh! . . . And you read that up as a sign of guilt?"

"How can I say?" whispered Mrs. Mayhew tragically. "What *are* the signs of guilt? Naturally she would be upset—and the fear of being suspected might make her look queer."

"Exactly." Dick raised his voice and spoke in an obstinate, a dogged tone. "I pin my faith on Doris. Is it likely that she would jeopardise— What temptation?"

"Well, she's scraping up all the money she can for her marriage."

"Oh!" Dick was now walking about the room, and in one

of those flashes of his imaginative thought he seemed to see a door with the word "Cells" above it. He spoke hesitatingly and rather huskily. "Aunt Kate—if she *had* been mad enough— Well, we wouldn't give her up, would we? We'd try to shield her?"

They slept little that night, and Mrs. Mayhew passed a quietly distracted day while Dick was turning an inattentive ear to his University lecturers.

On the morning of the next day, after starting for the railway station, he ran back to the house and told his aunt he had met the police inspector, who had expressed himself as satisfied in the possession of "a clue" which might speedily lead to developments. The inspector enjoined complete secrecy and begged that Dick and his aunt would not attempt to take any steps on their own account. The police desired a clear field.

"I thought you ought to know," said Dick, and he ran across the Green again.

Mrs. Mayhew became more agitated than ever, and an hour later, alone with Mrs. Skeat in the dining-room, she ignored the inspector's professional request. Mrs. Skeat asked if anything had been done about that man Bradley, and when she heard that the affair had now passed into the hands of the police she sat down unbidden. Indeed it was as if all her strength and stolidity had failed her.

"Oh, ma'am, I don't like that at all. I never thought you and Mr. Richard would go and mix yourselves up with the police;" and she shook her head dolefully and reprovingly. "This house will be given a bad name. We shall have a scandal of it before we're done."

"Yes, but Mrs. Skeat—"

"It's very unpleasant, you'll admit that, ma'am. Oh, it's very unpleasant. Such a thing has never happened in all my service—not to have any truck with the p'lice. I tell you frank, I don't like it at all." But then she seemed to recover her customary good-natured self-possession. That tolerant smile broadened on her fat face. "I'm silly, I suppose—too old-fashioned. I dessay it's all correct. Yes,

no doubt you and Mr. Dick done the right thing—under the circumstances."

The rest of the day was peaceful on its surface. Then in the following afternoon the depths were stirred. Something terrific occurred.

It was Doris's afternoon out. Mrs. Mayhew had been lying down, endeavouring to make up for another sleepless night, and when she issued from her room just before tea-time Mrs. Skeat spoke to her from above on the top floor.

"Will you please step up here, ma'am."

Mrs. Mayhew went up the short steep flight of stairs to the top landing, and Mrs. Skeat pointed to the open door of Doris's bedroom.

"Go in there, ma'am, if you please," said Mrs. Skeat.

She was stolid enough now, yet portentously solemn too; breathing hard, and holding Mrs. Mayhew, dominating her with severe eyes.

Mrs. Mayhew went into the bedroom.

It was neat and tidy like Doris herself, clean and spotless; the boards about the square of carpet shining, smelling of soap as if they had been recently washed; on the painted chest of drawers two or three photographs looking pathetic in their cheap frames; and on the narrow mantle-shelf an alarm clock, ticking slower but not less loudly than Mrs. Mayhew's heart-beats. She knew what she was about to hear said. She seemed to have dreamed all this, or to have acted it many years ago. The girl's poor little tin trunk had been pulled from under the bed by Mrs. Skeat; it stood there with the key in the lock, and the huge inexorable woman pointed at it with a finger.

"Some of the lost property is inside."

"But I shouldn't think of searching her boxes. Certainly not. I have no right."

"Oh, yes, ma'am, *if* you please;" and Mrs. Skeat stooped over the box. "Seeing's believing."

"Did—did she leave the key like that?"

"Not she. Hidden. I bin hunting for it all afternoon."

Reluctant, shrinking, but dominated, Mrs. Mayhew was compelled to see. There were layers of clean white petticoats, print frocks, other garments, and Mrs. Skeat dived her great bare fore-arm down at the side of the box, much as you may see a stern customs officer with the baggage of a suspected traveller, raising each layer deftly until she had disclosed the lowest layer of all. On this reposed the silver punch ladle, a china vase, and the piece of brocade.

"Have you seen?"

"Yes, I've seen," said Mrs. Mayhew, shivering and drawing away.

"Very good."

Mrs. Skeat replaced the layers, shut the box, locked it, and pushed it under the bed. "You know what my opinion has always bin. Remember what I told you when you engaged her—you'd live to regret it."

Doris had returned from her outing. She had taken off her hat and scarf; she was here with Mrs. Mayhew and Dick in the dining-room; and they had accused her.

"No, no, sir. . . . No, ma'am. Never on this earth. Nothing. Not one single thing. Believe me, I'd have died sooner. Oh, how can you think it after all you've done for me?"

Her flustered denials were most pitiful to hear. She chattered volubly, she twisted her body, she brandished her arms; her face was white, with the features working in a spasmodic manner. She looked guilt personified.

"But I tell you the things were found in your box. How do you account for that?"

"I can't—I can't account."

"How did they come there?"

"I don't know—unless somebody put them there. Oh, sir—" She was wringing her hands, contorting herself, and she said something so palpably absurd that Dick smiled mournfully. "Could I have put them there myself in my sleep? I've been dreaming of it all night long. Could I have done it—unconscious?"

"I'm afraid that explanation is too far-fetched," said Dick, firmly yet gently. "Doris, listen. Stop talking. We appeal to your better feelings—to confess the truth."

Dick was magnificent. Mrs. Mayhew, even in the midst of her great distress, was admiring him, thanking providence for this tower of strength that had grown up at her side almost imperceptibly.

"Doris," he said again, "confess. Don't think we want to be hard on you, or mean to abandon you—altogether. Trust us and tell us the truth."

"Yes," said Mrs. Mayhew, "we'll try to make excuses. Help us to get back the locket—*that* at least you ought to do. Though even if you don't—well, even then, I won't be hard."

But she would not confess. She persisted in her obstinate denials.

Then Dick told her that she was foolish as well as wicked, because the police were busy investigating the theft.

At this Doris collapsed. It was most painful to see. She made a suffocating sound, half cry, half sob; she seemed to totter, and then sank upon the sofa between the fireplace and the window. She sprawled there, sobbing and moaning, gaspingly lamenting.

"The p'lice! The p'lice. . . . Then I'm done for. What chance can I have against *them*—innocent or not? They'll out with my record. . . . Oh, ma'am. . . . Oh, sir, it's cruel of you—it's downright cruel—when you both know."

"But there would be nothing to fear if—"

"Nothing to fear!" and she laughed wildly. "You've never been in their clutch—to say that. Give a dog a bad name—"

"Doris, listen."

Suddenly she came from the sofa, on her knees, scrabbling across the floor, and seized the folds of Mrs. Mayhew's dress. Her face streamed with tears, and frantically she implored Mrs. Mayhew to believe her, to accept her denial in spite of suspicion, evidence, everything.

"What can I say to her?" cried Mrs. Mayhew.

"I—I don't know," stammered Dick. Notwithstanding his outward aspect of manly fortitude, he felt wretchedly miserable; and as the girl, still on her knees, released Mrs. Mayhew's skirt and flung her arms across the seat of a chair and let her hand fall upon her arms, he felt as if he had been physically maltreating her, as if he had been knocking her about with his fists, as if he had thrown her down there on the floor. As he stood over her she seemed to have dwindled from the fairly large Doris that he had always known into a small weak quivering creature of no size at all.

"My good girl, pull yourself together. I want to tell you what you must do."

"You needn't tell me," she sobbed. "I know. I shall go and pitch myself into the river. It's all there is left for me to do."

"My dear child, don't say such mad things. . . . We are your friends. We mean to be your friends. . . . Get up;" and he tried to raise her, but she sank down again. "Doris"—he said something of which his aunt was still then ignorant—"the police are coming this evening. Do you hear? The police may come—within an hour or two —or sooner."

To this point the scene had been painful, but now it became agonising.

She began to speak of her sweetheart—not to them but to herself, in a voice of such immeasurable woe that it seemed to be tearing them to pieces. "Oh, my boy, my own boy. I shall lose you now, after all. If others disgrace me, how can you want me any more? But I loved you so —I loved you so." It was elemental, heart-destroying, insupportable—like a mother crooning her grief over a dead child, like a soul in torment calling to them across dark rivers from another world. "Oh, my love. Oh, my darling boy."

"Dick, stop it. I can't bear it."

"Doris, for heaven's sake listen to me." He had taken possession of her; forcibly lifting her, he seated her on the chair and held her so that she should not fall off side-

ways. "Calm yourself. There's no time to lose. You must get away. Go upstairs and pack your things as fast as possible, and get off."

She merely shook her head and gurgled in her throat.

"Doris," cried Mrs. Mayhew. "Do what he says. While you're packing he'll fetch you a cab. Or don't pack. We'll send. Give her money, Dick."

"Don't you understand?" Dick shouted. "Delay is dangerous. We cannot save you if you stay. Here—here's two pounds—and this silver—all I've got. I'll send you more. Write to me."

She would not take the money, she would not consent to fly. Obdurate to their frenzied entreaties, she refused the means of escape. After a while she ceased to weep and shake; and then she grew calm, or rather despair seemed to give her a sort of stonelike composure.

"Let them come for me," she said. "I won't run away." As she said this she stood up and put her hand to her forehead. "I shan't touch my box. I shall go straight down to the kitchen and wait for them. They'll find me there when they want me;" and she crept from the room.

Mrs. Mayhew and Dick sat together then. Dick by the window and his aunt on the sofa, both of them exhausted, shattered. Again dusk was falling. The mass of the line trees darkened, beneath them it was like a black vault; occasionally people moved along the roadway between the house and the Green, each passing figure more vague than the last one.

"Dick, turn on the lights."

"No—if you don't mind—I want to see outside."

Ah! He made a little start. More figures. A helmeted figure had shown itself moving along the side wall towards the back entrance; there was another against the garden railing, another further on. The inspector in his cap, with a person dressed as a civilian, had entered the garden and was ascending the steps.

"They have come," Dick whispered. "They are all round the house."

"Let me in, please, sir," said the inspector, quietly

through the open window; and Dick admitted him and the other person. They went down the kitchen stairs. The inspector would not allow Dick to go with them. He was grave and authoritative, very much in command of the situation.

It was rapid then, violent, terrible, and yet with very little noise to it. One heard the heavy footsteps, the sound of doors being opened and shut—then came a scream, and after that they could catch only a murmur of voices. And then, incredibly sooner than one would have expected, the inspector was upstairs again in the dining-room; talking loudly, genially, and triumphantly. He had switched on the electric light and Dick and Mrs. Mayhew blinked at him.

"Just as I suspected, ma'am. The thief was nearer home than you thought;" and he laughed contentedly. "Well, here's your locket—pawned in the Tide End Road. I just brought the pawnbroker's assistant to identify her—but as soon as he comes into the kitchen she gives a yell and throws up the sponge. Yes, confesses everything. She wants to ask your pardon before we take her away. Will you see her?"

"Yes, if she wishes," said Mrs. Mayhew faintly.

The inspector went into the hall and shouted.

"Bring her up."

"Mind you," he said, returning to the room, "we've had our eye on her for a long time. But of course you had no suspicions—you were hoodwinked. Oh, she's a bad 'un, and an artful one. . . . Bring her in."

And through the open doorway a constable pushed or led the enormous Mrs. Skeat.

It was she and not Doris who was the thief. Secret drinking, bad company, and a too indulgent mistress—as she now dolefully confessed—had been her downfall. Taking that locket was "a bit of insanity," and as soon as it was missed she had feared that the game was up. But then at the last moment she had tried to save herself by directing suspicion to Doris—"knowing Doris's story."

"Oh, Mrs. Skeat!" said Mrs. Mayhew.

Really there was nothing else that she could say.